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DECONSTRUCTING THE GENDER PARADIGM: THE THEATRE OF TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER

By

WENDELINE PHILPOTT

MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

Edmonton, Alberta

SPRING 1992

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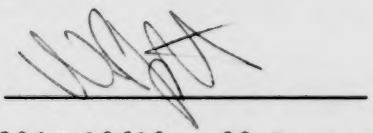

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled DECONSTRUCTING THE GENDER PARADIGM: THE THEATRE OF TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER submitted by WENDELINE PHILPOTT in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS in DRAMA.

Carl Hare

Jan Selman

Janice Williamson

29 November 1991

THESIS ABSTRACT

"Deconstructing the Gender Paradigm: The Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker" argues that British playwright Timberlake Wertenbaker deconstructs the traditional paradigm of gender and that from this critical treatment transpires the central dramatic situations in her plays. The argument holds that Wertenbaker does not necessarily attempt to provide a substitute gender paradigm, but rather she suggests a heterogeneous dynamic of pluralized genders.

The thesis identifies, describes and analyzes Wertenbaker's gender deconstruction in three plays written between 1981 and 1988: New Anatomies, The Grace of Mary Traverse and The Love of the Nightingale. The analysis focuses on the dramaturgical means by which Wertenbaker deconstructs gender in both the dramatic (written) text and the performance (staged) text. Furthermore, the semiotic implications of the dramaturgical approach are explored.

The thesis is composed of five chapters. Chapter One establishes the critical, conceptual and methodological framework of the argument and analysis; this includes the defining of key terminology, such as "deconstruction" and "gender", and draws on recent work of feminist critics of theatre and literature. Chapters Two, Three and Four examine gender deconstruction in each of the plays respectively. Chapter Five concludes the thesis by comparing the three plays and charting Wertenbaker's feminist development and deconstructive treatment of gender.

PREFACE

I have chosen to make this study of Timberlake Wertenbaker because her plays involve two areas which are of particular concern to me. As a feminist critic I am concerned with representations of gender which expose and defy traditional assumptions. As a theatre critic I am concerned with recognizing effective means of representation which expose things we are not ordinarily aware of. Wertenbaker's theatre brings about the coalescence of these interests, and this, I believe, makes her work important from both feminist and theatrical critical perspectives.

An analysis of Wertenbaker's plays does not necessarily need to centre on her treatment of gender, for the key issues in her work may also be described as dealing with identity, desire and language, for example. The fact that gender is not the only perspective which a thorough study could take up is indeed to the credit and merit of Wertenbaker as a playwright of considerable density and dimension. It is perhaps primarily because issues of gender are central in my critical practice that I am taking this tack of analysis. Yet I want to stress that I am not imposing emphasis or interpretation on Wertenbaker's material. The intention is that the thesis will provide analysis and illumination of the issues existing in her texts. In the plays I examine, Wertenbaker clearly presents a feminist perspective, for she develops plots springing from, and expanding through, crises relating to gender

roles. She makes this most evident as transgressions of traditional gender roles occur. Interwoven with gender are other key issues such as those I have just mentioned. Essentially, then, I am following the aspect which strikes me as most prominent, and from that perspective I consider the whole work.

Throughout the thesis I have drawn on critical practices of feminism, deconstruction and semiotics to assist the analysis. Though Wertenbaker may not have consciously set out to "deconstruct gender", principles of deconstruction, as originally formulated by Jacques Derrida, do correspond to, and help describe, her treatment of gender. My intention is that by applying these theories and practices, I will enrich understanding of the work and open some avenues for performance interpretations.

I need to clarify that Derrida's deconstruction originated as a way of reading texts and finding the points where the author had to subvert, hide or ignore some facets in order to carry through a desired line of argument. It is a critical tool for finding the "blindspots" in a work. Since then, some artists have set out to create deconstructive works. As I say, I do not necessarily believe that Wertenbaker consciously decided to write plays which deconstruct the traditional gender paradigm. Rather, I think she is cognizant of postmodern forms of representation which often have essentially deconstructive goals. Given that she clearly ascribes to an aesthetic which could be labelled feminist-postmodern, my opinion is that her work can be considered as one which deconstructs as a way of telling a story -- as she says

herself, theatre should not be made easy.[1] Hence, I am not striving to make a deconstructive reading of Wertenbaker, as Derrida might have me do. Instead, I am pointing out the deconstructive treatment which exists in her plays so that practitioners may be aware of it and thus work effectively with it.

This study is intended primarily for theatre practitioners. I consider practitioners before critics or academics because I believe they may benefit most from an analysis which draws out dramaturgical aspects as those aspects may inform and heighten performance. Rather than attempting a reconstruction of particular productions of the plays, which I think could limit the analysis, I discuss the play's dramatic and performance texts to illuminate their theatrical potential.

Finally, a note about Timberlake Wertenbaker, the person. Over the course of my study of her work I have repeatedly attempted to make contact with her through correspondence. She has never responded and presumably wishes to be left alone, or she does not want to engage in an analytical dialogue about her work. Indeed, it is fair enough that an artist will feel that she gives of herself through her works, and that is legitimately all she is willing to give to the public. In reference to wanting to keep her personal life private, Wertenbaker stated in 1988:

> I resent the idea that you have to look into a writer's life to explain the work, because that assumes there is

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[1] D.L Kirkpatrick, ed., Contemporary Dramatists, 4th ed. (Chicago: St. James Press, 1988) 154.

no transformation, no creative process involved.[2]

Consequently, little more is known about Wertenbaker beyond the intriguing points that she is British-American, was raised in the Basque region of France, earned a degree in philosophy in the U.S., spent some time in Greece and has now been living in England for over ten years as a playwright.

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[2] Sheridan Morley, "Gender is not the case," The London Times 7 Nov. 1988.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE GENDER PARADIGM and DECONSTRUCTION: FRAMEWORKS FOR ANALYSIS

Timberlake Wertenbaker writes plays about crises of displacement, subversion and transcendence. Her characters struggle to assert self-determined identity despite cultural and ideological forces which impose normative expectations upon them. Within the context of oppressive patriarchal and imperial power structures gender is central in the crises of the plays as Wertenbaker critically emphasizes the culturally determined construction of gender roles. The plays show both the process and the consequences of gender construction in the normative model, and they show the cause and the means by which transgressions of "natural" gender behaviour can occur. Wertenbaker's perspective is necessarily feminist, for her primary concerns clearly lie with the fate of her women characters; yet she opens up the scope of her feminist perspective by suggesting that the problems in her plays are the result of a common conflict *between*, and *within*, the gendered sexes. Hence, Wertenbaker combats the common notion of gender as determined by the simplified sex binary of man/woman; characters do not necessarily fulfil expectations of their sex/gender. Her plays

thus suggest that the imposition of certain gender roles causes much of the oppression individuals may experience within a dominant normative culture.

In her project of exposing the covert encoding of gender paradigms, Wertenbaker employs anti-realist and deconstructive dramaturgical techniques. She deconstructs gender through story, plot, character delineation and anti-realist forms of presenting them in both the dramatic (written) and performance texts.[3] In this thesis, I am using three plays which reflect Wertenbaker's treatment of gender: New Anatomies (1981), The Grace of Mary Traverse (1985) and The Love of the Nightingale (1988). I shall devote a chapter to each of these plays.

Forming the integral aspects of Wertenbaker's plays as well as informing the critical framework through which I analyze the plays, the concepts of gender, deconstruction and anti-realist dramaturgical strategies need elaboration. To this end, the work of several feminist critics assists in clarifying definitions and suggests how Wertenbaker's deconstruction of gender is relevant to, and exemplary of, recent feminist thought.

Considered quite generally, the ideological positions of feminist thought reflect three basic premises, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive: the first seeks unequivocal equality with men; the second seeks to distinguish the difference between women and men; the third seeks to critically expose the

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[3] I shall define my terminology used here in the course of the chapter.

socially constructed notion that men and women form clear binary opposites which place them in pre-determined roles. This third type is dominant in Wertenbaker's feminism, for she deals with issues of women coming into conflict with patriarchal ideology because of their desire to act in ways contrary to their "natural" position in that binary scheme. Toril Moi elaborates on this point of imposed gender norms as the source of women's (and often men's) oppression:

> 'Femininity' is a cultural construct: one isn't born a woman, one becomes one, as Simone de Beauvoir puts it. Seen in this perspective, patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women, in order precisely to make us believe that chosen standards for 'femininity' are *natural*. Thus a woman who refuses to conform can be labelled both *unfeminine* and *unnatural*. It is in the patriarchal interest that these two terms (femininity and femaleness) stay thoroughly confused. Feminists, on the contrary, have to disentangle this confusion, and must therefore always insist that though women undoubtedly are *female*, this in no way guarantees that they will be *feminine*.[4]

Wertenbaker makes this disentangling of biological sex and social/cultural gender part of her dramatic project. Elaborating further, Judith Butler sets out the exploded definition of gender which articulates Wertenbaker's premise in her plays. Butler's definition first explains gender in its relation to biological sex:

> When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one.[5]

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[4] Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London: Routledge, 1985) 65.

[5] Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990) 6.

The definition of gender is further pluralized (or exploded) when its total cultural constituents are taken into consideration. Butler states:

> If one 'is' a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive...because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out 'gender' from political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained.[6]

Thus, recent feminist thinking challenges fundamental notions of gender. When all women are thought of as one and the same gender, a homogeneous group, based on common physiology, they are forced into a category founded not on *who, how and where* they are, but on simply *what* biological function they may serve. It is a well-concealed misnomer to ascribe biological categorization to social beings. Although human beings can perform two distinct roles in the biological function of procreation, our varied social and cultural acts which engender us are more pervasive in the span of a lifetime. Furthermore, as Teresa de Lauretis points out, the term 'gender' in many languages does not imply biological sex but can be generally defined as representing a *relation* of categories.[7] Hence, gender may represent the intersection of, for example, race, class, region and sexual orientation.

Given the possibility of gender as a constructed and

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[6] Butler 3.

[7] Teresa de Lauretis, Technologies of Gender (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) 3-5.

heterogeneous concept, a means of actually exposing and demonstrating it as such is called for. Because the cultural constitution of gender is so well concealed by an ideology which names it "natural", the means for its exposure must necessarily be subversive. It is therefore appropriate that deconstructive techniques be employed, for as Moi asserts, "the goal of the feminist struggle must precisely be to deconstruct the death-dealing binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity."[8] Deconstruction is called upon by many feminist critics as the necessary means of undermining deeply entrenched conceptions of gender roles, for one of deconstruction's central aims, as formulated by Jacques Derrida,[9] is to dismantle the binary-oppositional determination of identity. In her article entitled "Feminism and Deconstruction", Mary Poovey writes:

> ...in its demystifying mode, deconstruction does not simply offer an alternative hierarchy of binary oppositions; it problematizes and opens to scrutiny the very nature of identity and oppositional logic and therefore makes visible the artifice necessary to establish, legislate, and maintain hierarchical thinking. Given this emphasis, deconstructive strategies could enable us to chart more accurately the multiple determinants that figure in an individual's social position and (relative) power and oppression.[10]

Although the ensuing discussion of Wertenbaker's three plays

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[8] Moi 13.

[9] Derrida sets out his formulation of deconstruction as a critical approach in his primary texts: Of Grammatology (1977) and Writing and Difference (1978). For an introduction to deconstruction, see Christopher Norris, Deconstruction: Theory and Practice (London: Routledge, 1982).

[10] Mary Poovey, "Feminism and Deconstruction," Feminist Studies, 14.1 (Spring 1988): 51.

is largely devoted to showing deconstruction in action, some description at this point may help clarify the deconstructive approach.

Subjected to deconstructive treatment, a concept such as gender is shown to have more to it than may be commonly perceived. It is the calculated way of showing, of revealing or exposing, that which is invisible which makes an act deconstructive. Janelle Reinelt gives some explanation of how deconstructive strategy may be effected in theatre:

> One way to explode the old hegemony is constantly and vigilantly to practice disruptive or law-expanding behaviours...the representation of the subject-in-process practising resistance, exploding the straight jacket of gender through doing the "work" of self-inscription on stage, before an audience, is both theoretically and practically a vital, imaginative, political act.[11]

Deconstructing binary classification of, for example, man/woman, masculine/feminine, active/passive, entails the deployment of various techniques or styles of representation which may be described as postmodern.[12] This contrived form of representation

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[11] Janelle Reinelt, "Feminist Theory and The Problem of Performance," Modern Drama (Spring, 1989): 52.

[12] For the sake of retaining focus on deconstruction, which is in fact an aspect of postmoderism, I will limit elaboration on this vast topic. But, briefly: "postmodern's initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as 'natural' (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact 'cultural'; made by us, not given to us." Often, postmodern treatment is ironic and may include parody and self-reflexivity. Linda Hutcheon, The Politics of Postmodernism (London: Routledge, 1989) 2-3.
Furthermore, critic Catherine Belsey states that the overall project of postmodernism is to "problematize", it seeks to "show up problems and difference". Statements made by Professor Belsey during her lecture "Writing About Desire", given at the University

is necessarily non-realistic; in fact, it is anti-realistic.

Elin Diamond states that Derrida considers mimesis (realism) representation at its most naive. Diamond explains why realism as a form of representation cannot be effectively used within the deconstructive project:

> ...realism surreptitiously reinforces the arrangements of the world. Realism's fetishistic attachment to the true referent and the spectator's invitation to rapturous identification with fictional imago serve the ideological function of mystifying the means of production, thereby concealing historical contradictions, while affirming or mirroring the 'truth' of the status quo.[13]

Ann Kaplan also recognizes that "realist strategies used uncritically remain a problem"; she points out that when some form of meta-language[14] is not visible within the representation, the possibility of analysis is denied, it becomes merely a transparent "window on the world", in the guise of truth.[15] Both Kaplan and Diamond suggest the intentional "foregrounding" of the narrative process as a means of showing its construction and thus pulling the spectator out of that uncritical "rapturous identification". It will become increasingly evident that this is particularly relevant in relation to Wertenbaker's narrative and dramatic forms. In her

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of Alberta, September 16, 1991.

[13] Elin Diamond, "Mimesis, Mimicry, and the 'True Real'", Modern Drama (Spring, 1989): 61.

[14] Language which comments upon its own discourse; self-reflexive language.

[15] E. Ann Kaplan, "Discourses of Terrorism, Feminism, and the Family," Women and Film, ed. Janet Todd (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988) 261.

article entitled "Refusing the Romanticism of Identity: Narrative Interventions in Churchill, Benmussa, Duras" Diamond advocates narrative disruption as a way of deconstructing both the narrative process and the content of representation. Writing about the three other women playwrights, a group with whom Wertenbaker would comfortably fit, Diamond discusses their narrative disruption as a method of "interrupting those processes of audience participation that collude in female subjugation." She writes:

> ...by dismantling the conventional representation of female character, all three [playwrights] refuse to romanticize female identity. But, as feminists, these authors are also concerned with the historical human activity that confuses or conflates identity and gender....Their solution...is a radical representation of history itself -- not as a backdrop or setting but as a narrative text which insistently shapes or interrupts the dramatic present and thus alters audience perspective on the event.[16]

This quite accurately describes Wertenbaker, for her most characteristic dramaturgical technique is historical dislocation.

None of the plays which I am looking at in this study is intended as an history play in the sense that it reinforces the prevailing historical narrative of the period in which it is set. The most elementary deconstructive aspect of Wertenbaker's plays is her choice of historical contexts. These are usually periods wherein women are traditionally positioned as static and non-dynamic. But, by placing a woman in the centre of an historical context, she is shifted from her traditional position of object to

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[16] Elin Diamond, "Refusing the Romanticism of Identity: Narrative Interventions in Churchill, Benmussa, Duras," Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) 94.

subject, which is already disruptive of dominant historical narratives; women are repositioned where they have previously been merely obstacles for men, if not completely invisible. The Grace of Mary Traverse, which is set in the late eighteenth century, is a case in point: Wertenbaker has said that the initial idea for the play came from a series of William Hogarth prints entitled "A Rake's Progress";[17] but she has substituted Mary Traverse for the male rake, essentially making a feminist revision of that story.

Moreover, the issues which are explored in all three plays are as equally relevant today as they may have been at any other point in history; in fact, perhaps they are more relevant, for they are now recognized as political issues. In other words, they are familiar issues to a modern audience. By dislocating them in foreign contexts, they are defamiliarized and may thus be examined from a fresh perspective. Indeed, Wertenbaker herself has stated: "people can't see their own times very clearly, especially if it's to do with issues between men and women."[18] Furthermore, the different periods and cultures in which the three plays are set may be subjected to stereotypical preconceptions; thus, putting contemporary issues within those contexts defamiliarizes the context as well. In effect, then, the deconstruction works in both ways and presents an incongruous representation of both content and context.

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[17] Ray Conlogue, "Best foot forward in the theatre world," The Globe and Mail 10 Jan. 1987: E3.

[18] Conlogue.

Wertenbaker's gender deconstruction demystifies the man/woman binary by emphasizing points at which characters transgress or transcend circumstances which threaten to keep them in some kind of traditional role based on that binary. If this were the extent of Wertenbaker's deconstruction of gender, it would imply a very limited feminist perspective by suggesting an "essentialist" form of feminism, which advocates the idea that all women are essentially good, all are victims of men and all have a common enemy in men. This stance would, in fact, undermine any deconstructive project because it does not dismantle the gender binary but simply reverses the roles within it. Wertenbaker, however, completes the deconstruction of gender by showing that within groups of women (or men) there are many differences which can override their commonness of sex. As both Judith Butler and Teresa de Lauretis assert, one's gender delineation includes non-sexual aspects such as class or culture.

To this end, Wertenbaker shows women of contrasting gender constitutions who are as equally vulnerable to falling victim to patriarchal oppression as they are to imitating it. She suggests that solidarity between women does not necessarily exist because of the differing and conflicting modalities within their gender constitution. Furthermore, men are not all represented as the calculating minds behind patriarchal dominance. Wertenbaker's depiction of male characters suggests that they too are in a struggle with deeply entrenched norms of patriarchal ideology which impose various expectations of masculinity upon them. Thus,

revealing gender differences between and among women and men is crucial to the complete deconstruction of gender: the man/woman binary is exploded, followed by the diffusion of the homogeneous conception of "man" and "woman".

Deconstructive representation in theatre places certain demands on its audience. The audience is confronted with various explosions of "normalacy" and traditional theatre conventions: the familiar is made unfamiliar; common perspectives become oblique; the invisible is suddenly visible; the usual audience desire for recognition and identification is challenged; the audience tendency to "narrativize", to seek the logical, sequential links between actions, is also challenged. A crucial consequence, then, of the deconstructive process is that the audience is put into a critical relationship with the representation. Moreover, deconstructive works are often, certainly in the case of Wertenbaker, left open-ended and ambiguous, pointing to the responsibility of the audience to grapple with potential conclusions or meanings.

In my discussion of Wertenbaker's three plays I attempt to divide their dramaturgical elements for the purpose of analyzing and subsequently understanding how they coalesce in the completed theatrical presentation. Separating the elements of a play is a somewhat tenuous endeavor as so much of the dramaturgy works through the reciprocal and interdependent relationship of its elements. Nevertheless, the dramaturgical sum, so to speak, is constituted by parts, and discussion of these can elucidate the

means by which Wertenbaker deconstructs gender.

There are two main parts of a play: the "dramatic text" and the "performance text". Within the dramatic text I consider the elements of story, plot, character and language. Within the performance text I am primarily concerned with how the staging and enactment of the dramatic text creates visual and corporeal semiotic messages which embellish the play as a whole. I have appropriated the terms 'dramatic text' and 'performance text' from Keir Elam, who devotes much of his book The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama to distinguish, yet reconcile, these two parts of a play.[19]

The difference between story and plot is clearly defined by Manfred Pfister in The Theory and Analysis of Drama:

> Whilst story consists in the purely chronologically arranged succession of events and occurrences, the plot already contains important structural elements, such as causal and other kinds of meaningful relationships, segmentation of phases, temporal and spatial regroupings, etc.[20]

By distinguishing the stories from the plots in Wertenbaker's plays, we may clearly observe how she treats and presents the story within the plot structure. Furthermore, the story itself may include deconstructive aspects which are embellished through the

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[19] At the beginning of his book Elam states: "...the researcher in theatre and drama is faced with two quite dissimilar -- although intimately correlated -- types of textual material. Those two potential focuses of semiotic attention will be indicated as the theatrical or *performance text* and the written or *dramatic text* respectively." Keir Elam, The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama (London: Routledge, 1988) 3.

[20] Manfred Pfister, The Theory and Analysis of Drama, trans. John Halliday (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 197.

devices of the plot.

In examining the characters of the three plays, I consider their delineation as it is constituted by gender, sexual, cultural, class and political modalities. I also look at the character dynamics, determining which characters drive the action and how/why they dominate. Furthermore, I consider the styles in which Wertenbaker draws her characters, for she deploys various degrees of parodied or dramatically developed characters. Finally, as part of the analysis of character, I consider which constellation, or grouping, each is connected with.

The definition of language I adopt for the purpose of this study is fairly broad. That is, I define language as the means by which characters communicate with each other and, in some instances, directly with the audience. Hence, I consider spoken language and communicative connotations through silence and physicalized expressions. Language is significantly interrelated with that of character; Wertenbaker's attention to the language of characters elucidates gender differences.

The last dramaturgical aspect which needs clarification is that of performance semiotics. Like "language", "semiotics" potentially refers to all aspects of theatre -- everything that entails the communicative process of sign and signified[21] -- yet,

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[21] Elam provides a broad definition of semiotics: "Semiotics can be best defined as a science dedicated to the study of the production of meaning in society. As such it is equally concerned with processes of *signification* and with those of *communication*, i.e. the means whereby meanings are both generated and exchanged." Elam 1.

I am limiting its definition for the purpose of my specific concerns with the plays I examine. I am interested in the messages which are created from the dramatic text, by the dramatic situations, yet are actually manifested in the performance text. In other words, the semiotics I refer to are essentially the visual, corporeal images created by the actors and setting of the play. I should point out that I do not comprehensively address the performance semiotics of the plays, for I do not analyze from specific stagings, but rather from the dramatic text. As I mention in the Preface, part of my objective is to disclose the theatrical potential within Wertenbaker's texts; thus, I discuss the performance text in terms of the material Wertenbaker provides which points to certain anticipated staged results.

The method, or organizational approach, by which I analyze each of the three plays is perhaps unusual. I examine the dramaturgical aspects of each text in a kind of "backstitching" pattern: as I progess, I draw the focus back and around the material just discussed, but each time including new elements of the text. By this approach, I attempt to systematically illuminate the compounding dramaturgy and multiple perspectives of the work while maintaining sight of its total context. Hence, I proceed through each play by first summarizing the basic story; I then add the plot, which encompasses the story, considering the dramaturgical elements within the plot (including character, language, etc.). Then, either before or after dealing with the plot, I compare the story/plot to the source from which Wertenbaker

adapted the play. In doing this, I "backstitch" over certain dramatic or dramaturgical aspects, yet only for the purpose of illustrating the way in which they may contrast with the source. I then move the discussion to the reciprocal dramatic/performance texts and point out the semiotic implications, yet again re-covering aspects, but from a new perspective. Thus, my goal with this method is to understand the construction of the plays as each dramaturgical layer is added in order to illuminate how the dramaturgical whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts.

In this thesis I use two approaches in dealing with gender deconstruction in Wertenbaker's theatre: I make a *dramaturgical analysis* of the ways in which gender is deconstructed and I make a *critical argument* which holds that Wertenbaker does indeed deconstruct gender. I think this dual approach is necessary in order to thoroughly substantiate my premise. Moreover, I maintain that one cannot make a critically neutral analysis of a play's dramaturgy, nor can a critical argument be carried through without reference to fundamental dramaturgical aspects. Similar to the reciprocal relationship between the dramatic and performance texts of a play, the projects of analysis and criticism necessitate correlation.

Thus, having established the conceptual, critical and methodological frameworks through which I examine gender deconstruction by Wertenbaker, in the following three chapters I make individual studies of New Anatomies, The Grace of Mary

Traverse and The Love of the Nightingale respectively. In Chapter Five I consider the common and distinguishing features in the three plays and identify Wertenbaker's feminist development in deconstructing the gender paradigm.

CHAPTER TWO

GENDER AND CULTURE IN NEW ANATOMIES

Wertenbaker wrote New Anatomies for production by the Women's Theatre Group[22] in 1981. Similar to The Grace of Mary Traverse and The Love of the Nightingale, New Anatomies depicts a woman protagonist who seeks freedom and experience, but in so doing must break social codes, creating further obstacles which she struggles to overcome. Like the other works, difference between and within genders and cultures is a central concern. In this play, Wertenbaker emphasizes cultural transgression as interdependent with gender transgression; the protagonist makes a journey in which she rejects impositions of gender inscription at the same time as she rejects the whole culture which tries to force those impositions. The source for New Anatomies is biographical rather than fictional as is the case with the other works; the play is based on the life of Isabelle Eberhardt (1877-1904), though Wertenbaker makes some important changes to the supposed real story. The play also differs from Mary Traverse and Nightingale by

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[22] The Women's Theatre Group are a London fringe company, established in 1974. They produce plays which deal with women's issues from a feminist perspective.

its radical staging requirements which embellish and add complex semiotic schemes to the story and the play as a whole and thus perform a major part in the deconstruction of gender. Consequently, New Anatomies necessarily needs to be considered in terms of both its dramatic text and its performance text.

New Anatomies recreates the story of turn-of-the-century cross-dresser Isabelle Eberhardt, who joined male Arab culture in French-occupied Algeria. As a girl, Isabelle lives in the chaotic household of her distraught mother Anna and her domineering socialist revolutionary stepfather Trofimovitch. Isabelle is strong and wilful: she instigates the games she plays with her older, effeminate brother Antoine; they recreate the stories they have read in books, playing lovers on adventures in Siberia and the Sahara. Meanwhile, their older sister Natalie is angry about the irregular household, the embarrassment Trofimovitch causes her, and at her mother's refusal to act like a "proper" mother and housewife. Natalie announces that her marriage to a "normal" man will be her escape. Several years later when Antoine has run off to the French Legion and her parents have died, Isabelle lives with Natalie and her husband. Natalie talks about finding a husband for Isabelle so that she will be safe and normalized. Isabelle convinces Natalie that they should first visit Antoine in Algeria. Finding Antoine married, apathetic and devoid of their shared sense of romance and adventure, as well as seeing Natalie and her sister-in-law Jenny exploit the native Algerians, Isabelle dresses as an Arab man and leaves her family for the desert. Rejecting European

life, she changes her name to Si Mahmoud and is accepted into a nomadic Sufi sect. Although her Arab friends realize she is a woman, by customary courtesy they ignore it and accept her own determination of her gender. While travelling the desert, seeking peace, knowledge and adventure with the Sufi culture, Isabelle is tracked down by the French military, who refuse to allow her, a "romantic young girl", to travel alone with "savage" Arabs. While in Paris to appeal her banishment from the desert, Isabelle meets a group of cross-dressed women at a salon. Her appearance is treated as a great novelty, and when the women explain their reasons for wearing men's clothing, Isabelle emphatically implies that she *is* a man, and that she enjoys homosexual relations with other men. She manages to return to the desert; however, soon she is banished from it again when a rival Arabian sectarian attempts to murder her because she offends their religion by dressing as a man. At the trial of the attempted murderer, *Isabelle* is found guilty by the French judge of having perverted nature. Later, at 27, she lives in Algeria with Severine, the "notorious lesbian", who is writing her story. A French colonel takes an interest in her and tries to use her for his own political ends by sending her to Morroco; however, Isabelle returns early from her mission, suggesting that the men there would not accept her gender determination. The story ends when Isabelle, losing both spirit and health, lets herself drown in a desert flash-flood, leaving her journals to Severine as documentation of her story.

Wertenbaker has made changes to the "real" story of Isabelle

Eberhardt. The biography exists in a number of documents, including the journals, some of which were published several years after Eberhardt's death. My source for her biography is entitled The Destiny of Isabelle Eberhardt by Cicily Mackworth, published in 1951, which is based upon the journals and interviews with people who knew Eberhardt.[23] The changes within the play suggest that Wertenbaker intentionally reinterpreted the history in order to develop some ideas for which Eberhardt's impressive story provided the basis as well as the inspiration. The specific changes are important to note here, for they inform some understanding of Wertenbaker's objectives. The following points constitute the most significant changes: the play omits the fact that Isabelle was married to an Arab and spent much of her time in Algeria living with him; the relationship between Isabelle and Severine as her biographer is fictionalized; Natalie left Isabelle's life in the early days in Geneva, leaving no chance for her to act as guardian; Isabelle did occasionally wear women's clothing, such as at her wedding; and there is no mention in the biography that Isabelle encountered other cross-dressed women in Paris. The exact nature of Isabelle's sexual exploits is not discussed by Mackworth beyond

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[23] Cicily Mackworth, The Destiny of Isabelle Eberhardt (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951). I acknowledge that this biography is also an interpretation, but probably the interpretation which Wertenbaker drew from. In addition, some of the sources Mackworth and Wertenbaker likely used are the following:
Isabelle Eberhardt, Mes journaliers (Paris: La Connaissance, 1923).
_____, Pages d'Islam (Paris: Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1920).
_____, Amara la forcat l'anarchiste (limited edition; publisher unknown, 1923).

repeated comment that Isabelle had a notorious reputation among the colonialists of Algeria for "debauchery". Mackworth's biography emphasizes the almost entirely male world in which Isabelle lives, while Wertenbaker's play emphasizes the challenge Isabelle feels by the imposing presence of women. Although the effects of patriarchal authority are certainly obvious in much of the play, the female characters are positioned as the main motivating force behind Isabelle's rejection of gender norms. Thus, in distinction to Mackworth's biography, the play shows Natalie taking a larger role in provoking Isabelle, the women in the Paris salon reinforcing Isabelle's desire to reject womanhood, Severine essentially replacing the role of Isabelle's husband, and the physical absence of her stepfather Trofimovitch, whom Mackworth suggests had a vital influence on Isabelle's character. In short, Wertenbaker foregrounds women in Isabelle's story and repositions the men in the background.

These adaptations serve the function of presenting an intensified and exaggerated story of gender and culture transgression. In a sense, Isabelle makes multiple transgressions of gender in rejecting European culture, imposed femininity and heterosexuality, and instead defines herself as Arab, masculine and homosexual. The forces which she struggles against may all be considered manifestations of European patriarchal ideology. Emphasis in the play on the colonial exploitation of Algeria and military domination by the French constitute overt patriarchal oppression, yet, in addition, a more covert patriarchal dominance

is suggested by the conditioned notions of feminine domestication and, to an extent, emancipation. Wertenbaker emphasizes a layered oppressive context, which deconstructive representation helps expose. To this end, Isabelle not only breaks patriarchal and ethnocentric binary schemes of masculine/feminine and civilized/savage, she also demystifies the notion of women as a homogeneous group.

Within the plot Wertenbaker creates a deconstructed representation of Isabelle's experiences by pointing out the volatile character dynamics and oppressive social contexts which motivate her radical changes. Furthermore, the scenes emphasize and develop Isabelle's constant effort to resist the cultural impositions of her European background.

The stage direction for the opening scene describes Isabelle:

> ISABELLE EBERHARDT *looks around, none too steady. She is dressed in a tattered Arab cloak, has no teeth and almost no hair. She is 27.*[24]

Hence, the play begins near the end of Isabelle's story, with her physical image suggesting the struggle of her experiences. The scene establishes the narrative framework and perspective of the play: Isabelle telling her life story to Severine while she is close to delirium from illness and alcohol. Her discourse is fragmented and suggests her stream of consciousness, combining

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[24] Timberlake Wertenbaker, New Anatomies, in Plays Introduction (London: Faber and Faber, 1984) 299. All future citations from the play will be taken from this edition; the page number(s) will be parenthetically inserted within the text.

aspects of her sexual, emotional and political constitution which have formed her into this present condition. She also shows her unstable gender identity when she states, "I was the only boy in the family" (301) and then alludes to having had sexual relations with her brother Antoine, and finally concludes the scene stating that she will begin her story "as is our custom, with a mention of women" (301). The scene points to her complete denial, or at least disregard, of herself as female, as well as her persistent self-reference as Si Mahmoud, her self-appropriated Arab name.

The second scene initiates the story she tells Severine, beginning with her girlhood in Geneva. The action brings each of the character's gender delineations into relief as they contrast and react against one another. Anna delivers a refractory speech about her children and Trofimovitch, expressing loss of control in her life, for she seems overwhelmed by her roles as mother and wife of a socialist revolutionary. Antoine, described in the stage direction as "*frail and feminine*" (302), is fearful of, and humiliated by, Trofimovitch. He is overtly contrasted to Isabelle, who shows self-assured strength which is also apparently the result of Trofimovitch's influence ("he always said I was the bravest" [309]). Isabelle and Antoine's dialogue emphasizes their unusual gender delineations; he, wishing for refuge in femininity, and she, undoubtingly considering herself free from any constraints of girlhood:

> ANTOINE: I have no choice. I'll have to run away and join the army.
> ISABELLE: I'll come with you, we can take Mama.
> ANTOINE: The army's only for boys.

ISABELLE: We can't leave Mama.
ANTOINE: I wish I was a girl. He doesn't treat you that way.
ISABELLE: I'm strong.
ANTOINE: He'll kill me. (302)

The behaviour of the characters is stressed as being aberrant by Natalie's reaction to them as she enters the scene and immediately reprimands them for not falling into normal roles:

> ...In a family you have first a mother who looks after her children, protects them, teaches them....A mother who teaches her children how to behave and looks after the house, cooks meals,...And secondly in a family a brother is a brother, a boy then a man, not this snivelling, delicate half girl....and finally in a family you have a proper father, not that raving peasant, who's driven us to this misery and filth, who's now trying to get into my bed at night. (304-305)

In the following scene (act 1, scene 3) Isabelle is under the guardianship of Natalie, who believes she can return Isabelle to normalacy by finding her a husband. Isabelle's resistance to this idea is made quite evident as their discourse divides into opposing plans for the future. Natalie tries to push her ideas of domestication, and thus sexual repression, while Isabelle ruminates about sexual freedom and romance, pointing to Algeria and the desert as her objective rather than a house and husband:

ISABELLE: What's marriage like?
NATALIE: We're doing very well with the shop now and soon we'll build our own house, a big one.
ISABELLE: I mean at night.
NATALIE: You get used to it.
ISABELLE: Brutal pain and brutal pleasure, and after, languor. "And the breeze languished in the evening hours as if it had pity for me."
NATALIE: You've been reading too much. You mustn't talk like that to men. When they come into the shop you must be seen working very hard, dusting things very carefully. That always inspires young men. We've thought a lot about Stephan's cousin. He has a flower shop and he won't mind

the fact that you look so strong. You could help him in the garden. You'd like that.
ISABELLE: Does he grow cactus plants?
NATALIE: They're the wrong plants for this climate.
ISABELLE: It's the wrong climate for the plants. I'm going to Algeria.
NATALIE: The thought of marriage frightened me too, but I'll help you make a good choice. You'll need a roof over your head.
ISABELLE: No rain in the desert, no need for a roof.
NATALIE: We're in Geneva and I'm here to protect you until you're safely married.
ISABELLE: Geneva of the barred horizons. I'm getting out, I need a gallop on the dunes. (308-309)

Act 1, scene 4 develops this struggle between feminine domestication and colonization, now espoused by both Natalie and Jenny, and Isabelle's persistent and increasing rejection of such European ideology. She increasingly sympathizes with Algerian culture and suggests nomadic Arab life, the opposite of European culture, as her means of escape. Meanwhile, Antoine is positioned in the middle of the struggle. Having married and joined the military, he is clearly dispossessed by the social obligation to conform to traditional masculine roles and is thus represented in a state of withdrawal and apathy. While Isabelle tries to draw him outside to their once-shared romance, Jenny tries to keep him inside as her husband and provider:

ISABELLE: (*to* ANTOINE) Let's go to those dark dens in the Arab quarter and have a smoke.
ANTOINE: If they recognize us (*throat-slitting gesture*).
ISABELLE: We'll say we're from Tunis. That'll explain my accent.
JENNY: You can't go out. What about me?
ISABELLE: Come, Antoine, for at least one evening, let's go back to our dreams. (314-315)

Isabelle's resistance to European cultural colonialism, which is clearly reflected by the other two women, is heightened as she

repeatedly refutes and corrects Natalie's and Jenny's exploitive, ignorant comments about Algerian culture:

> NATALIE: It's wonderful how stupid these people are. They give things for nothing.
> ISABELLE: The word is generosity, gifts of hospitality.
> NATALIE: Look at this one, it's worth a fortune, that embroidery, that detail. They're terribly clever for savages. Look at this woman's cloak.
> ISABELLE: It's not for women. (313)

Finding that Antoine has allowed himself to be conscripted into the culture which she increasingly wants to resist, and recognizing that her family represents the oppressors of occupied Algeria, as well as of her own desires, Isabelle finally leaves them, along with all traces of the identity she felt forced upon her. Thus, Wertenbaker shows the characters in Isabelle's family, and their conformity to cultural and gender roles which she detests, as a major motivating force for her to assume a new identity which is opposed to all that they represent.

Isabelle's monologue, constituting scene 5 of the first act, is a clear disclosure of her ambition to completely break from the roles and labels which constrict her own desire and identity:

> If, down an obscure alleyway, a voice shouts at me: hey you, shopkeeper - I'll not turn around. If the voice pursues me: foreigner, European - I'll not turn around. If the voice says: you, woman, yes, woman - I'll not turn around, no, I'll not even turn my head. Even when it whispers Isabelle, Isabelle Eberhardt - even then I won't turn around. But if it hails me: you, there, who need vast spaces and ask nothing but to move, you, alone, free, seeking peace and a home in the desert, who wish only to obey the strange ciphers of your fate - yes, then I will turn around, then I'll answer: I am here: Si Mahmoud. (315-316)

In the next scene (act 1, scene 6) Isabelle is with her Arab friends on the desert, fulfilling her self-proclamation of the

previous scene. The Arabs clearly accept her as Si Mahmoud and are willing to ignore the fact that she is female: "It is a courtesy in our country not to be curious about the stranger. We accept whatever name Si Mahmoud wishes to give us" (320-321). Isabelle's relaxed and respectful manner with the Arabs directly contrasts with her defiant resistance in the previous scenes with her family. Meanwhile, the discourse of Saleh and Bou Saadi emphasizes their oppression by the French occupation of Algeria ("We were born crossing the desert, but now we have to ask permission to go to certain places" [317]). The imposition of colonization parallels the imposition of European womanhood which Isabelle resists; thus, the scene suggests that Isabelle finds solidarity with the Algerians in sharing a common antagonist from which they all seek refuge. As though affirming this suggestion, Captain Soubiel enters and destroys the peaceful setting by patronizing and insulting the group as he tries to destroy their relationship. He clearly represents patriarchal and ethnocentric intolerance for gender and cultural interchange, stressed in the way he denies Isabelle's chosen identity:

> Ah, youth, the female heart. I admire your spirit, Mademoiselle, but it is the duty of the French Army to rescue damsels in distress. (319)

In the second act of the play, another group of characters serve a motivational function similar to Isabelle's family in reinforcing her urge to reject European and feminine gender norms. The cross-dressed women she meets in the Paris salon (act 2, scene 1) are poignantly made out as fashion-conscious intellectuals. They

represent the height of European culture, whose reasons for wearing men's clothing clearly contrast with Isabelle's. Upon noticing Isabelle, Eugenie mistakes her for a real male Arab:

> Ah, there, a true one, I can tell. A young oriental prince, look at the simplicity, the dignity. Oh, do present him to us.

Responding, Lydia says of Isabelle:

> Yes, that's quite a find, but that's not a real Arab either. Much more interesting, you have there a young woman who travels with the savage tribes of the Sahara...look at her, she could become quite the rage. (323)

Isabelle says conspicuously little in the scene; but what she does say and do is clearly in defiance of the trivializing treatment she receives, and dispels the romantic image the women make of her. Choking on her champagne, she spits on the floor, she then tells them about eating cat in Tunis, and then she finally faints from her illness contracted while working on the docks of Marseilles for nine months. She undermines their charmed perception of her by demonstrating the realities of her life in the desert, which entail far more cultural and physical changes than simply dressing as a romantic Arab man.

Each of the women explains her reason for wearing men's clothing: for Lydia it is so that she can think and write more seriously; for Verda it is so that she can broaden the scope of her singing repertoire; for Severine it is so that she can go to public places with her women lovers; and for Eugenie it is so that she can travel more freely. As their ensuing conversation reveals, cross-dressing is to disguise, not to actually negate, their feminine

gender delineation. When Isabelle implies that she *is* a man and has homosexual relations with men, she completely demystifies herself; their curiosity turns to disgust, even for Severine who states, "I don't like vulgarity. I'm afraid I can't help you" (327). Her offence to the salon women lies in her total rejection of womanhood, both heterosexual and homosexual. Wertenbaker makes Isabelle deconstruct her own cross-dressed appearance by exposing the full extent of her gender and cultural identity. Although there is certainly difference of purpose among the salon women in dressing as men, from Verda's entertainment needs to Lydia's intellectual dependency, Isabelle stands apart from them, for her change goes much deeper than theirs.

In act 2, scene 2 Isabelle is back within the Arab context, and again the agitation she displayed within the European context of the preceding scene is contrasted. Her expressions emphasize her feeling of peace ("Oh these happy, these drunken hours of return" [328]) and release from cultural constraints ("Take off at last the grimacing, degraded mask" [329]). The scene first suggests her deeper inclusion with the Arabs, "He can now become one of us, a Qadria" (328). However, her attempted murderer undercuts the ease of this inclusion, and points to diversity within the Arab culture, for some sects will not tolerate her cultural/gender transgression: "You're offending our customs" (331). Responding to the murderer, "But that's why I left *them*" (331), Isabelle suggests that she is now twice displaced by patriarchal cultures in her attempts to find freedom.

The next scene shows a distortion of the trial of Isabelle's attempted murderer: *she* is persecuted rather than *him*. Though she is essentially framed by the French court authority, Isabelle undercuts the "order" that the Judge says he is trying to maintain when she responds to his verdict:

> JUDGE: ...You, Miss Eberhardt, have perverted nature.
> ISABELLE: You mean nature as farmed by you to make you fat. (333)

Her implication constitutes a deconstruction of patriarchal law and order, suggesting that it creates definitions and justifications for what is "natural" behaviour in trying to preserve its power of authority.

Isabelle's first lines of act 2, scene 4, "Blocked. Detour. Blocked again" (333), signal a closing of the frame of her story as she reappears in her sick and intoxicated condition of the opening scene. She is evidently falling into a state of despair as she breaks Muslim law by drinking alcohol: "Make better sense with absinthe. Understand the world then: nice blur" (333). Her waning spirit is made more obvious by instances in the scene where she shows her weakening identity as Si Mahmoud; first by indicating that it has passed:

> LAYAUTEY: They say, Si Mahmoud, you're a young man in search of knowledge.
> ISABELLE: Was. (335)

Then Isabelle refers to herself as a "Slav" (337), alluding to her family's Russian origins. She begins to lose her persistence for defining herself as Arab, despite Lyautey's supposed willingness to acknowledge that identity. This apparent change in Isabelle may be

interpreted as another form of her resistance to Europeans: now that someone is willing to accept her Arab identity, she is compelled to combat such association with her antagonists.

While Lyautey's offer of five months in Morroco appears to be a means for reclaiming Si Mahmoud, the time she spends there in fact causes her further demise. In scene 5 she returns early from Morroco because she could not truly be Si Mahmoud:

> ....There were many young men of great beauty in those rooms, and we don't hate love. But I couldn't join. They would know I was not completely a man, and also, much of that was gone....(337)

Thus, Isabelle is back at the point where she began the play: sick, disheartened, wearing a tattered Arab cloak, with no teeth and almost no hair, at only twenty-seven years of age.

Rather than attempt to illustrate the gruelling experiences Isabelle had which caused her physical deterioration, Wertenbaker instead emphasizes the idea that Isabelle "forgot the script" (338) of Si Mahmoud. This loss of purpose is underscored by the fact she could not completely deny her female sex and that her gender/culture appropriation was not acceptable by all Arabic cultures. Wertenbaker shows that the struggle to reconstruct an identity which goes against dominant-oppressive structures functions as the underlining cause of her broken spirit and eventual desire to die.

The short final scene of the play (act 2, scene 6) contrasts attitudes to Isabelle's life. While Lyautey and Severine indicate the importance of preserving Isabelle's story through salvaging her journals, the Judge states, "Close the file. This person must be

officially forgotten" (339). The Judge's comment reiterates his earlier representation of patriarchal ideology which tries to subvert the possibility of deviation from socio-cultural norms. In this regard, the final scene presents a deconstructed recapitulation of the context in which Isabelle struggled, and again underlines dominant social unacceptance of individual expression and desire.

Within the dynamics of the story/plot, paradigms of gender and culture are deconstructed by being emphasized as socially created processes, as empirical actions which transpire through human-constructed cause and effect. The dramatic situations show the people and events which provoke Isabelle to resist and combat normative expectation of her European background, thus revealing how and why she makes transgressive moves in her life. Deconstruction at this dramaturgical level is indeed not blatantly manifested, for it does not vary in any radical sense from the plot dramaturgy of most modern plays. The full deconstruction of gender and culture occurs through the cumulative layering of the dramaturgical elements of both the dramatic text and performance text.

In the published text of New Anatomies Wertenbaker includes a crucial note about the play's specific staging requirements:

> New Anatomies is designed for a cast of five women and a musician....Except for the actress playing Isabelle, each actress plays a Western woman, an Arab man and a Western man. Changes should take place in such a way as to be visible to the audience and all actresses should be on stage at all times. The songs in the play ought to be

> popular music-hall songs from the turn of the century. Songs 2 and 3 belong to the repertoire of the male impersonator, and song 1 to that of the *ingenue*. (298)

The implied effect of these staging requirements on the story and its discourse is considerable. The most obvious effect is that the process and production of the narrative is entirely exposed as the characters are seen taking form and moving from one role to another. Moreover, a dynamic semiotic effect arises when transvestism occurs at both the story level and the performance level. The casting scheme of multiple and cross-gender roles puts into practice the ideas of the story -- about the varied and transitory possibilities of gender. A reciprocal and interdependent relationship between the idea and its presentation is created. Although the performance may cause confusion for an audience in their effort, for example, to distinguish between character-in-drag and actor-in-drag, it is precisely in such confusion that gender norms are obscured and thus made transcendable. In the ensuing consideration of the play in performance I attempt to disentangle its various aspects and show how the complexity of the performance text strengthens the deconstruction of gender and culture in the dramatic text.

The most outstanding feature of the performance is the representation of seventeen characters, including men and women, European and Arab, by five female actors. Considered for its initial implication, the all-woman cast asserts the premise that theatre creates the imaginative context in which transformation can occur and it should therefore be of no consequence that the actors

are all women. Within the economy of this theatrical setting, women actors, regardless of their own ethnicity, can play European and Arab men and women. Considered for its deeper implication, while traditional representations of sexuality and gender obviously show men playing men and women playing women, which simply effects the binary opposites and the frame of reference as heterosexual, the performance with all-women actors steps out of that traditional frame and suggests a feminist and heterogeneous perspective. Thus, the all-women cast immediately makes the performance anti-realist, and so potentially deconstructive of gender.

Compounding the immediate effect of the women players are the other specific staging requirements: the continuous on-stage presence of the actors/characters, the character/costume changes on stage, the three songs interspersing scenes, and the freezes indicated at three points in the text.

The continuous on-stage presence of the actors, together with the on-stage changes, creates an alienation effect whereby the audience is made aware of the means of production in the performance; they are made explicitly cognizant of actors playing the fictive characters. The alienation effect is also constituted in the promotion of self-awareness within the audience as they see actors outside the action looking on, and are thus reminded of their own act of looking. Furthermore, the situation of the female cast watching the play challenges the notion of performance being traditionally constructed for the male gaze, thus acting as another means of stepping out of the male-centred frame of reference.

In addition to creating narrative disruption, the various changes on stage serve as part of the deconstructive representation of gender. In seeing an actor/character move from woman to man, or woman to cross-dressed woman, the process of gender inscription is emphasized; such emphasis is important in order to reveal the constructed process and product constituting gender. Within this economy of multiple and cross-gender casting, the clothing *makes* the woman or the man, the costume engenders the subject, effectively deconstructing gender as being not pre-determined but rather constructed and assumed. In the context of the salon, Isabelle is compelled to reveal her sexual orientation since the integrity of her Si Mahmoud identity is threatened by her association with women who merely dress in "costumes" for disguise. Appropriately, the actor who plays Isabelle does not change character, but remains a constant character who wears "clothing"', as she tells the women of the salon, "It's not a costume, it's my clothes" (324).

The three songs punctuate and stress the action: first, after the opening scene between Isabelle and Severine; next, after she is "rescued" by Captain Soubiel; and finally, at the opening of act two in the Paris salon. All the songs are performed by the Verda Miles character, who intercuts the story with her dislocated spectacle, until the third song which she performs "*as a young man in Paris*" to the salon women. For the first song, Verda performs as an ingenue, the stage direction says, dressed "*as a Victorian girl in frills*"; the second song is supposed to be a popular music hall

song with Verda dressed "*as a colonial soldier*". All three songs, although not directly addressed to Isabelle, represent elements of the forces of oppression she tries to resist. First, a young girl in frills is presented when Isabelle is already rejecting the traditional identity of a young girl; second, a colonial soldier is presented just when the military removes her from the desert; third, a transvestite woman is presented when the salon women disturb Isabelle with their superficial transvestism. As well as intercutting the narrative-line of Isabelle's story, the songs act as parodied reminders of the people and identities she seeks to escape.

Like the songs, on the three times a "*freeze*" is indicated in the text, the effect is that of punctuating the action. The first freeze occurs when Isabelle dresses in Arab clothing for the first time while she is surrounded by her family members from whom she increasingly alienates herself. The stage direction states:

> ISABELLE *takes a jellaba and puts it on, slowly, formally. Freeze while she is doing this. Once in it she feels as at home in it as* JENNY *obviously feels awkward.* (314)

The second time a freeze is indicated Isabelle is in a key moment where she expresses her anger at the patriarchal forces which obstruct her, here represented by Captain Soubiel:

> CAPTAIN: You're quite a brave little character. I like that. I think we'll get on very well. You remind me of a delightfully unbroken filly.
> ISABELLE: Whereas you, Captain, remind me of a heavy cascade of camel piss. Mind you, nothing wrong with camel piss, I just don't choose to have it on top of me. Or, to put it another way, I'd rather kiss the open mouth of a Maccabean corpse dead from the Asiatic cholera than

"travel" with you, Captain
(*Freeze*). (320)

The third freeze occurs during the determinant moment in the salon when Isabelle reveals her full sexual identity:

ISABELLE: Do you really like women?
SEVERINE: (*Seductive*) Have you lived in the Orient and remained a prude?
ISABELLE: Me? Ha!
SEVERINE: There are thousands of women in this city who would do anything to be made love to by me. But I like women with character.
ISABELLE: I'm not a woman. I'm Si Mahmoud. I like men. They like me. As a boy, I mean. And I have a firm rule: no Europeans up my arse
(*Freeze*). (327)

With a similar dramaturgical function as the songs, the emphasized moments of a freeze occur when Isabelle is in a position where she actively resists forces which impose culture and gender models she detests: the cultures of her family, French military authority, and superficial gender transgression.

The types of character delineation are, of course, a vital dramaturgical force in the play; moreover, the characters are constituted through the reciprocal relationship of the dramatic and performance texts. Using a fundamental postmodern approach, Wertenbaker represents many of the characters in the play as parodied stereotypes, which are embellished through cross-gender casting wherein the act of mimesis (perhaps necessarily) becomes mimicry. The deployment of parody serves to undermine the social forces constructing the character. Thus, for example, the parodied representation of the French authority figures in the play undermines their discourse of authority; the transvestite appearance of Captain Soubiel or the Judge disrupts the patriarchal

logic they expound, allowing a critical perspective on the characters and their social context. The European men are presented as one-dimensional characters who do not develop, but rather hold a static position in the action. They are driven by singular impulses; to either subvert Isabelle, such as Soubiel, or exploit her, such as Lyautey. The important exception is Antoine who does develop over his two scenes. But otherwise, the European male characters are simplified representations of the antagonists in the story. The Arab male characters, on the other hand, are presented somewhat ambiguously, for they are at least two-dimensional; they develop by revealing concealed aspects of themselves, or have aspects revealed about them. They are predominantly presented as good, sympathetic characters in Isabelle's story, yet their sympathy and easy acceptance is indirectly undercut when Isabelle reveals her sexual relations with them (act 2, scene 1), insinuating an insidious exchange between Isabelle and her Arab friends. Also, Bou Saadi shows multiple character dimension when he demystifies the prejudiced European image of Arabs by explaining that Arabs create that image for self-protection: "It's not a good idea to irritate Europeans. It's best to pretend you're stupid and keep laughing..." (321). This stereotype-role-playing at the same time underscores the colonial oppression under which the Arab culture lives. Finally, the Arab characters are also represented as having diversified cultural delineations, for some will and some will not accept Isabelle as Si Mahmoud. Despite the various degrees of male characterization, they are all presented through male

impersonations by actresses, inevitably embellishing them as parodies, and so always undercutting them in some way.

The female characters also constitute a combination of character types, and through their various representations they impact the demystification of gender. Anna and Jenny, for example, conform to patriarchal ideology as aspiring housewives. Yet, because they are represented as exaggerated stereotypes by their constant espousing of all the "rights" and "wrongs" for European women, their conformity is pointed out as an insidious condition of oppression. The salon women are not stereotypical or flat characters because they do reveal several dimensions of themselves. Their transvestism functions deconstructively, not to undermine them in the way it does the male characters who are really actresses in drag, but to reveal the delimiting effects of patriarchy. The cross-dressing of the female characters points out constrictions of "womanhood" which they strive to overcome.

The deployment of transvestism at the story level and the performance level essentially works to the same end, the main difference being that one is told in the story, or the dramatic text, by the characters and actions, while the other is told semiotically through the performance text. In the performance, where women actors dress as, and mimic, male characters, transvestism undermines the authority or sympathy the characters claim: they express themselves through an overt disguise. In the story, where women characters dress as men, the constraints put on them by patriarchal ideology is emphasized by their need to

disguise their female identities in order to pursue their various desires. Essentially, the transvestism on both levels deconstructs the characters by suggesting the covert socially constructed forces behind their actions.

Creating a reciprocal relationship between form and content, or idea and presentation, Wertenbaker uses these various intertextual (dramatic and performance) techniques for effecting alienation, narrative disruption and embellished characterization. Isabelle's story is thus presented through a number of dramaturgical layers which intentionally make the story itself challenging to follow and its issues multi-faceted.

Though I have discussed the most crucial aspects of the performance text, there are still a few points which can be further elaborated in terms of the implications made for staging and performance. The continuous on-stage presence of the actors and the on-stage costume changes are obviously important to the play as a whole and to the deconstruction project, particularly as these aspects break with more common staging conventions. Given these staging requirements, questions arise about how overt the changes and on-stage presence should be. In a postmodern and deconstructive work, these elements, which break with realism and disrupt the narrative, emphasize their own dramaturgical functions. Wertenbaker presents the world of the play in such a way that its construction is evident; there is no attempt to conceal all the various forms of cross-dressing. Changes on stage could therefore be illuminated, or even highlighted, in some way rather than occur in the shadows of

the main action.

In delineating the characters as parodied by varying degrees, Wertenbaker initiates a complex variety of characterizations. For example: Severine is written with more sincerity than Captain Soubiel; the French/Europeans are written as more idiotic than the Arabs; and Isabelle is perhaps less parodied than any other character. Furthermore, the actresses' interpretations of men will automatically communicate some level of parody, which may or may not be emphasized, depending on the male character enacted. These variations of parody, then, demand specific differentiation in the performances. In addition, a factor in determining these points for performance is the individual reason for which each character has their gender and cultural constitution deconstructed. For example: Anna is deconstructed primarily to emphasize her oppression as wife and mother; Antoine is deconstructed primarily to reveal the oppressive imposition of patriarchal models on men; and Saleh and Bou Saadi are deconstructed to uncover their cultural self-protection from French usurpation. Thus, the performance may emphatically reflect the perspective Wertenbaker intends for each character.

Finally, given the importance and emphasis put in the functions and meanings of clothing and costumes, the costuming choices are significant. Some implications within the text regarding costumes are: Arabs and Europeans obviously appear culturally very different from each other; actors-in-drag versus characters-in-drag are distinguished, though not too much since

they communicate essentially the same deconstruction of engendering; and Isabelle wears "clothes" in the salon as distinct from the other women in that scene who wear "costumes".

Wertenbaker presents her story of Isabelle Eberhardt through a complex, and effectively deconstructive, layering of dramaturgical techniques. Given this reading of New Anatomies, Wertenbaker clearly does not suggest that the play is intended as a staged biography in the traditional sense of true-to-life biography. But it may be surmised that the play is intended to fictively present Eberhardt's autobiography. This is suggested by the frame of the play of Isabelle telling Severine about her life; it is further emphasized in the biased perspective of people and events -- Isabelle wanting to show how much she had to resist and react against that which created barriers for her desired freedom. Wertenbaker intensifies and embellishes Isabelle's perspective by the various forms of radical and deconstructive dramaturgy I have discussed. The play could be described as unabashedly biased, and this is perhaps the broadest way in which it is deconstructive. In this regard, I would suggest that Wertenbaker is very sympathetic to the historical person Isabelle Eberhardt, because she intimates how Isabelle may have experienced her life struggle. Regardless of the supposed historical truth, Wertenbaker shows a woman's potential experiences of gender and culture identity crisis, and as a result of this concern she deconstructs commonly held notions of gender and culture.

CHAPTER THREE

GENDER, CLASS AND POLITICS IN THE GRACE OF MARY TRAVERSE

The Grace of Mary Traverse premiered at London's Royal Court Theatre in October 1985, the season in which Wertenbaker was the Court's playwright in residence. The play constitutes the most complex dramatic text of the three plays I am examining: the issues of gender oppression and transgression are intertwined with those of politics and social class. The plot begins from an individualized feminist perspective and then builds to encompass a broader social perspective emphasizing the similarities as well as the contradictions between, and within, the dynamics of class and gender. In deconstructing class and gender (and the political umbrella under which they are manifested), Wertenbaker shows that the ideological binaries of rich/poor and man/woman do not necessitate a simple set of roles and relations.

The Grace of Mary Traverse tells the story of Mary Traverse, the daughter of a wealthy eighteenth-century London merchant, who grows tired of her training in charm and grace and becomes curious about the world outside her father's pampering, confining rooms. Provoked by her servant Mrs. Temptwell, Mary embarks on a journey

which takes her through London's dirty streets, to gambling dens, to rabble-rousing political mayhem. Her first experience of the outside world occurs when she is saved from rape on the street and then witnesses the young woman who saved her, Sophie, being raped. Mrs. Temptwell leads Mary to a men's coffee house where she is refused entry because of her sex. Angered by this, Mary agrees with Mrs. Temptwell that she will never return to her pampered life but will exchange it for the worldly experience that is the privilege of men only. Mrs. Temptwell arranges to have Mary sexually initiated by a male prostitute named Mr. Hardlong. But, still hungry for more experience, Mary goes to a gambling den, defies the men's sexual advances and confidently challenges them at cards and cockfighting. Calling high stakes, Mary wins at first but then loses, leaving herself in poverty. Later, Mary finds herself not only poor but pregnant and sick with the pox, and she whores for her father as means of getting money. Realizing the ugliness and corruption of the world she has discovered, Mary decides to join with the oppressed working-class to revolt for change. Gaining entrance to Parliament, Mary is manipulated and diverted by the politician Mr. Manners into believing that Catholics are the enemies. Mary loses all sight of what she does and becomes entangled in the historical Gordon Riots. Finally seeing the corruption and destruction which she has been tricked into instigating, Mary withdraws from the public realm. Disillusioned, she first rejects her child, giving her to Sophie; but she then decides to take her child back and reunites with her father. In the

final scene, Mary continues to dream of a new, just world.

As I mention in Chapter One, Wertenbaker was inspired to write Mary Traverse by a series of eight engravings by eighteenth-century artist William Hogarth entitled "A Rake's Progress", published in 1735.[25] Showing a satirical morality story, "A Rake's Progress" is a companion piece to Hogarth's earlier series entitled "A Harlot's Progress", published in 1732.[26] Both series depict a young person's rash means of rising out of their social class, resulting in complete self-destruction: for the Harlot it is primarily through prostitution and for the Rake it is through gambling and corrupt dealings with businessmen and aristocracy. It is important to note that Wertenbaker chose to model her protagonist on the Rake rather than the Harlot, though she does use the aspect of the Harlot's prostitution to a limited extent for part of Mary's story. By adapting the journey of the Rake, Wertenbaker opens up the scope of experience which Mary is exposed to; she enters a far more public and political realm than Hogarth's heroine. Mary's substitution for the Rake also heightens the extraordinary nature of the experiences because they are unusual to a woman protagonist of that historical period. Although the play certainly captures the lively and profligate characteristics of the engravings, Wertenbaker adapts them to develop her own particular concerns, which she generally states are: "to follow the path of a

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[25] William Hogarth, Engravings by Hogarth, ed. Sean Shesgreen (New York: Dover Publications, 1973) engravings 28-35.

[26] Hogarth, engravings 18-23.

woman who goes outside, and what happens to you when you go outside and attempt to take on the world".[27] Furthermore, she uses the historical period of the eighteenth century, with its fictive and true aspects, for metaphorical purposes rather than claiming a reinterpretation of the actual history.

Speaking about her method of playwriting, Wertenbaker has said:

> ...Once I have the idea and the people, I do a lot of research. I think plays should be accurate, whatever their subject. Then the imagination can be let free, but only after a solid knowledge of the world, the people, the age, whatever is the world of the play.[28]

Historical accuracy in Mary Traverse can indeed be found in its political, social and cultural setting, such as Giles Traverse and Mr. Manners representing the changing political climate of the Enlightenment in which the merchant and middle class was taking over from the aristocracy in Parliament, and Lord Exrake and Lord Gordon representing the failing aristocracy. But Wertenbaker also disrupts the chronology of the century, making the world of her play somewhat anachronistic. Commenting on her use of history, Wertenbaker writes in her note in the text of Mary Traverse:

> ...All the characters are my own invention and whenever I have used historical events such as the Gordon Riots I have taken great freedom with reported fact.[29]

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[27] Robert Crew, "Timberlake Wertenbaker: Taking on the World," The Toronto Star 19 Dec. 1986.

[28] D.L. Kirkpatrick, ed. Contemporary Dramatists, 4th edition (Chicago: St. James Press, 1988) 554.

[29] Timberlake Wertenbaker, The Love of the Nightingale and The Grace of Mary Traverse (London: Faber and Faber, 1989) 57. An earlier version of The Grace of Mary Traverse was published by

Wertenbaker's treatment of history has resulted in an amalgam of eighteenth-century characteristics and events drawn from different periods in the century. Included in this amalgam is her adaptation of theatrical conventions of the Restoration and Enlightenment comedy of manners; these are exemplified by the descriptive names Wertenbaker assigns the characters, the social and sexual witticisms and double entendre in much of the discourse, and the obvious class distinctions. Other historical aspects include the Gordon Riots which occurred in 1780[30] and the American revolution, referred to by Giles at the beginning of the play (61), which occurred between 1775 and 1783.[31] A poignant anachronism occurs in a scene where Wertenbaker compiles the names of various notable men of the eighteenth century as those who are socializing together in the coffee house which refuses Mary entrance (70). Although those named lived in roughly the same historical era and some associated with each other,[32] Wertenbaker fabricates and perhaps exaggerates the relationships.

Faber and Faber in a single volume in 1985. All my citations are taken from the second edition. The page number will be parenthetically placed within the text.

[30] The New Encyclopedia Britannica, Volume 5 (Chicago: 1990) 369.

[31] The Concise Columbia Encyclopedia (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) 26.

[32] Included in the group of names are: Henry Fielding (1707-1754), David Hume (1711-1776), R.B. Sheridan (1751-1816), Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) and David Garrick (1717-1779). Sheridan would have been only 4 years old when Fielding died, whereas Jonson and Garrick were indeed associates. Dates from The Concise Columbia Encyclopedia.

The dramaturgical function behind the various historical anachronisms is apparently to intensify the prevailing features of the eighteenth century, providing a distinct and effective context for Mary's story. Moreover, the most poignant departure Wertenbaker makes from common conceptions of the period is the placement of Mary, a woman, in the role of the protagonist who follows a path similar to the Rake in Hogarth's engravings and who assumes a role similar to the historical Lord George Gordon as the instigator of the riots against the Catholics.[33] By making a woman the subject within this contrived, yet predominantly accurate, historical context, both the context and the subject stand out and are defamiliarized.[34]

In the play's opening scene, Wertenbaker at once points to the historical and dramatic context. The first stage direction states:

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[33] Encyclopedia Britannica 369.

[34] Documentation of the confining and oppressive existence of the respectable middle-class woman of eighteenth-century London can be found in numerous sources, such as articles in The Spectator, a newspaper of the period, or in modern histories of the century. Historian Barbara B. Schnorrenberg writes in her article "The Eighteenth-Century Englishwoman": "The woman of the upper and middle classes were most touched by the political, economic, and intellectual changes of the eighteenth century....The view of the holders of power was that woman's only proper role was that of dutiful adjunct to man, whether daughter, wife, mother or sister. She had no place outside the family and its home....Women were more likely to be led astray by the temptations of the world, and so had to be protected by their men. It was the female's duty to provide a safe haven in which children could be nurtured in innocence and morality and where husbands would find refuge from the masculine wars of business, politics, philosophy and theology." In Barbara Kanner, ed., The Women of England: From Anglo-Saxon Times to the Present (Hamden:Archon Books, 1979) 185.

> ....MARY TRAVERSE *sits elegantly, facing an empty chair. She talks to the chair with animation.* GILES TRAVERSE *stands behind and away from her.* (59)

Mary's topic of conversation is nature, "It was here all the time and we've only just discovered it" (59), suggesting both the basis of Enlightenment thought[35] and Mary's domesticated and confined existence. More specifically, Mary's socio-economic and cultural delineation is signalled within the dynamic of the scene: her wealthy, merchant-father supervises her discourse, which is designed to flatter and allure her imagined male listener; her romanticized ideas of nature ("Peasants too I believe are a new discovery."[59]) suggests her conscription to the culture of fashionable and inane repartee as well as her detachment from the outside world and from the implications of her statements. Furthermore, Mary rehearses in her father's house to impress the imagined fop he hopes will marry her and thus keep her in another house; she is inevitably framed as a subject of patriarchal domination. Yet, throughout this discourse, Wertenbaker also shows Mary's propensity to divert from her cultivated feminine-passive line of behaviour in her repeated expressions of curiosity and desire to see and experience the world outside her father's home. For example:

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[35] According to Abby R. Kleinbaum in her article "Women in the Age of Light", the primary intellectual problem of the Enlightenment addressed the nature of humanity: "What characteristics and qualities of our existence stem from our nature, and thus from unchanging natural law? Which aspect of our lives result from the caprice of custom, and hence from man-made positive law?" In Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, eds., Becoming Visible: Women in European History (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977) 220.

MARY: [to empty chair] You visited the salt mines? Ah, to hover over the depths in a basket and then to plunge deep into the earth, into its very bowels.
GILES: No, no, my dear, do not mention bowels. Especially after dinner.
MARY: To have no more than a fragile rope between oneself and utter destruction. How thrilling!
GILES: No, Mary. It shakes your frame with terror and you begin to faint.
MARY: I wouldn't faint, Papa. I'd love to visit a salt mine. (59-60)

Expounding further, Mary asks her father if she can go with him to make a speech at the Antigallican (anti-Catholic) Society and if she can go to the theatre; but he refuses her requests. The economy of power and privilege imposed by Giles on Mary is emphasized by the contrast between his numerous references to the public and political realm, such as the Antigallican Society, the coffee house and the theatre, and her unsuccessful entreaties to experience that realm. Giles' evasive justification for her confinement to the home comes down to her property value to him: "You are my brightest adornment, my dear. I want to be proud of my daughter" (61).

The following scene enlarges on the absurdity of Mary's endeavour to fulfil the prescribed role of remaining cloistered and lady-like. The scene opens as she practises walking upon the carpet without leaving any imprint, attempting to achieve "the invisible passage of an amiable woman" (62). As she does this, her self-parodying monologue reveals the total repression of human, let alone sexual, physiology in order to conform to the ideal of feminine grace espoused by patriarchal ideology:

It was the dolls who gave me my first lesson. No well-made doll, silk-limbed, satin-clothed, leaves an imprint. As a child I lay still and believed their weightlessness mine. Awkward later to discover I grew, weighted. Best

> not to move very much. But nature was implacable. More flesh, more weight. Embarrassment all around. So the teachers came. Air, they said. Air? Air. I waited, a curious child, delighted by the prospect of knowledge. Air. You must become like air. Weightless. Still. Invisible. Learn to drop a fan and wait. When that is perfected, you may move, slightly, from the waist only. Later, dare to walk, but leave no trace. Now my presence will be as pleasing as my step, leaving no memory. I am complete: unruffled landscape. I may sometimes be a little bored, but my manners are excellent. And if I think too much, my feet no longer betray this.
> (*She walks.*)
> What comes after, what is even more graceful than air?
> (*She tries to tiptoe, then stamps the ground and throws down her fan.*)
> Damn! (62-63)

Mary's fan may be interpreted in semiotic terms as her index to femininity which is rejected in an impetuous moment of resistance to all that it represents. The speech and her actions are clearly intended to be ironic so as to deconstruct the code of female behaviour she is expected to assume.

Mrs. Temptwell enters and continues to undercut this ideal of eighteenth-century feminine perfection:

> MARY: Watch me Mrs. Temptwell. Do I look ethereal?
> MRS. TEMPTWELL: You do look a little ill, Miss Mary, yes. (63)

She obviously aims to provoke Mary's urge to resist by further ridiculing her practice when she tells Mary about her dead mother:

> She went in and out of rooms with no one knowing she'd been there. She was so quiet, your mother, it took the master a week to notice she was dead. But she looked ever so beautiful in her coffin and he couldn't stop looking at her. Death suits women. You'd look lovely in a coffin, Miss Mary. (63)

The power dynamic Wertenbaker constructs between these two characters is complex. Although Mary has economic and class power over Mrs. Temptwell as her servant, Mrs. Temptwell has an insidious

manipulative power over Mary. While she points Mary towards breaking from patriarchal ideals of women of her class, she undermines the act by also instigating the inevitable change of economic position which Mary must accept with her change of gender delineation. As the play progresses, it becomes more evident that in order for Mary to escape upper-class gender oppression, she has to face the realities of lower-class oppression. In this regard, Wertenbaker has Mrs. Temptwell act as an agent for the play's deconstructive project of revealing that a woman of the upper class can only have such class privilege if she succumbs to patriarchal moulding; if she refutes that domination, she does so at the expense of her class privilege. But before Mary herself comes to this revelation she experiences and performs numerous aberrations of gender and class norms.

Lord Gordon's soliloquy (act 1, scene 3) functions as the masculine analogue to Mary's preceding monologue: where she exemplifies a parody of upper-class feminine endeavour, he represents a self-parodying example of contrived manhood. Complaining that he is "a man of stunning mediocrity" (65), he pines about wanting to be famous by whatever idiotic means of public display it takes, just so long as people notice him. His speech implies that male identity is dependent upon action and recognition within the public sphere, thus contrasting with Mary's speech about the necessity of a constrained female identity. When Lord Gordon imposes his physical strength on Sophie, a young woman with no secure domestic or economic refuge, in the act of raping

her, he believes he achieves power which is on a par with the political power of Mr. Manners, whom he wishes to emulate. Thus, with new self-confidence, Lord Gordon joins Mr. Manners to celebrate his manhood by engaging in public activities which are emphasized as privileges of their class and gender: to the chop house to gorge, to the coffee house to make witticisms, and to the games den to gamble. To the men, the sum of Lord Gordon's experience is simple:

> LORD GORDON: Mr. Manners, I'm a different man.
> MR. MANNERS: What's happened? A legacy?
> LORD GORDON: (*Quietly*) Power.
> MR. MANNERS: Ah. Power. (70)

Mary's initial naivety is emphasized in her exchange with Mrs. Temptwell in the same scene. Mrs. Temptwell constantly undercuts Mary's ignorant comments, pointing out the cost of upper-class privilege and, in so doing, deconstructs the rich by exposing the poor as the brunt of their exploits:

> MARY: I believe I've just stepped on something unpleasant, Mrs. Temptwell. These streets are filthy.
> MRS. TEMPTWELL: The dirt runs out of great houses like yours.
> MARY: What? I don't like this world. It's nasty.
> MRS. TEMPTWELL: If you're squeamish, don't stir the beach rubble.
> MARY: What did you say?
> MRS. TEMPTWELL: It's a saying we had in our family.
> MARY: Did you have a family? I can't imagine you anywhere but in our house.
> MRS. TEMPTWELL: Lack of imagination has always been a convenience of the rich.
> LORD GORDON: Hhmm.
> MARY: What? I do wish these people weren't so ugly.
> MRS. TEMPTWELL: Their life is hard.
> MARY: They ought to go back to the country and live like beautiful peasants.
> MRS. TEMPTWELL: They've already been thrown off the land. Some of them were farmers.

MARY: Papa says farmers stop progress. I meant beautiful peasants I could talk about with grace. There's nothing here to improve my conversation.
MRS. TEMPTWELL: It takes time to turn misery into an object of fun. (66-67)

Wertenbaker points out again that patriarchal power and authority is manifested and maintained through the oppression of groups such as women and the poor. But Mary is not yet cognizant of this because her perspective is limited by her selfish curiosity. Although she witnesses Lord Gordon's display ("I couldn't stop looking. [*Pause*] It's not like the books." [69]) she is unable to respond to the violation because Sophie's submissiveness constitutes correct feminine behaviour; moreover, Lord Gordon demonstrates masculine power and prerogative which distracts and intrigues Mary.

Consequently, Mary tries to follow Lord Gordon and Mr. Manners but finds herself locked out of their world, a situation epitomized when she is denied access to the aptly named Universal Coffee House (act 1, scene 4). The exclusively patriarchal domain of the coffee house is stressed when Mary is denied access because she is female. Furthermore, to Mary's question "What sex is wit?" the waiter names the men inside, who constitute the foremost purveyors of Enlightenment culture: "Mr. Fielding, Mr. Goldsmith, Mr. Hume, Mr. Boswell, The Doctor, Mr. Sheriden, Mr. Hogarth...Mr. Hayden, Mr. Voltaire...."(70). The list of notables at once emphasizes the sex of dominant culture and functions as a reminder of the historical context in which Mary's presence seems incongruous. Throughout the exchange with the Boy who bars Mary's

way, Mrs. Temptwell characteristically prompts the questions which provoke Mary to the point when she confirms her desire to transcend her limitations of gender:

> Run the world through my fingers as they do? (*Pause.*) Oh yes, I want it....I want the world as it is, Mrs. Temptwell, no imitations, no illusions, I want to know it all. (71-72)

The following two scenes (act 2, scene 1 and 2) show the repercussions of Mary's departure from her father's home. In The Brother's Club, another exclusively patriarchal setting, Mr. Manners tells Giles that in the interests of promoting a political career, he should consider Mary dead. The exchange stresses the ideology of the world Mary discovers, a world in which politics subverts the family, where public life is considered more important than private life. Furthermore, when Giles questions Mrs. Temptwell about Mary, she takes advantage of his weakened position to tell him of the converse side of public domination over private. She reminds him that he forced her family off their land in order to develop his pottery industry; her family industry was economically coerced to comply with corporate industry. Giles' attempt to threaten her with imprisonment for leading Mary away is also turned against him when Mrs. Temptwell replies that she could spread the scandalous truth about Mary; she points out his enslavement to public and patriarchal expectation which necessarily subverts his personal life. Holding her position of power over Giles, Mrs. Temptwell draws him down to pleading with her, from which she derives vengeful satisfaction because the lines of class distinction between them are momentarily obliterated. Thus, in

trying to reclaim his daughter, Giles confronts the ramifications of his social status, feeling the constraints it makes on his life from both politically superior and inferior factions.

Act 2, scene 3 launches Mary's flight from feminine submission to masculine exploitation. At lodgings in Marylebone, an elegant residential area of London, Mary is sexually initiated by Mr. Hardlong, an expensive male prostitute. Through this business transaction Mary first thinks the control she feels -- "I am the flesh's alchemist" (77) -- from sexual activity with a prostitute constitutes power. In effect, she attempts to imitate Lord Gordon's aberrant example of acquiring power. Sex in these circumstances, however, is a perverse commodity, and Mrs. Temptwell makes it part of her project to reveal this to Mary when she gives Sophie to Mr. Hardlong as his prostitute in order to regain the money spent on Mary's exploits. Mrs. Temptwell still acts for vengeance as she mockingly simulates for Mary the operations of the patriarchal-imperial world in which people are exploited for political and economic gain and then considered expendable.

In the following scene Wertenbaker accelerates Mary's journey through the masculine world as she confronts, adapts and then contorts what she perceives as their means of empowerment. Set within a games den on Drury Lane, yet another exclusive patriarchal context, Mary enters armed with her new knowledge of sexual politics and her hunger for more experience. Lord Exrake first assumes that Mary is there to offer sex; then when he sees that she means to play cards he accepts her on the assumption that sex is

forthcoming as a reward ("a beautiful young lady can always pay, one way or another" [82]). However, Mary defies the sexual advances of Lord Exrake as well as the patronizing attempts of Mr. Manners to dispel her intrepid attitude:

> MR. MANNERS: The gambling is serious here.
> MARY: Is money ever frivolous, Mr. Manners?
> MR. MANNERS: The stakes are high.
> MARY: I can pay. Show them our money Mrs. Temptwell. (82)

Thus, the only way Mary can command any remotely serious regard in this male-dominant context is by wielding her financial capacity. However, as an ensuing scene makes clear, Mary operates on a false sense of financial power, for the money she has can only come from her father, who represents the constrictions which she seeks to escape. Emphasizing the paradox, Mary uses Giles' money while at the same time she denies her connection to him:

> LORD EXRAKE: What is your name?
> MARY: Mary.
> MR. MANNERS: Your other name.
> MARY: Do you mean my patronymic? I have none. I'm unfathered. (82)

While Lord Exrake ramblingly recalls his sexual exploits of the past, apparently unable to contain such comment in the presence of women, Mr. Manners continues attempting to disprove Mary's effectiveness in the games den context, "You ought not to be here, Mary. I know who you are" (84). But Mary undercuts him with the wit she cultivated in her father's drawing room and, at the same time, she deconstructs the foundation of Enlightenment thought:

> MARY: Your suspicions run down my neck, Mr. Manners, you do not trust the fairness of the fair sex. I promise I've encountered fortune head on, no female detours for me....
> MR. MANNERS: No. Your discards were good, Mary.

MARY: One learns. To discard. Yours too must be good.
MR. MANNERS: It is more in man's nature.
MARY: Then nature is simply a matter of practice. (84)

The discourse of the scene is fraught with sexual innuendo and double entendre which emphasizes not only the stylized representation of eighteenth-century repartee but also Mary's increasing ability to challenge male culture despite the prevailing patriarchal attitude which imposes women's "natural" propensity for docility. Wertenbaker keeps this attitude in view during the scene in the character of Robert who says he plans to make a school for women which "will help all these lost girls find virtue and religion again" (81).

After winning at cards, Mary moves to cockfighting, challenging Mr. Hardlong and winning again. But her thrill from winning is immediately curtailed by Mr. Hardlong's advance on Sophie and rejection of Mary and her offer of money. In retaliation, Mary competes for Sophie rather than appear weak by grovelling for Mr. Hardlong. As Sophie is lured by Mary's offer of money, Mary says: "...but you must work for it. Nothing for nothing. That's their law. When they offer you money, you know what for. Well?" (89) Thus Mary lifts up her skirts to Sophie and has her whore for her in front of the men. In doing so, Mary thwarts the male gaze by demystifying female sexuality, exposing a homosexual dimension and incongruously displaying the act in the men's den: "What is it gentlemen, you turn away, you feel disgust? Why don't you look and see what it's like?" (89) The humiliation and disappointment Mary feels from Mr. Hardlong's rejection of her,

obviously favouring Sophie's submissive femininity, agitates her so much that she chooses to enact sexual exploitation of a woman as an extreme means of proving herself capable of playing masculine roles. At the same time, Mary mocks the patriarchal initiative of paying for sexual pleasure like any other business transaction.

The final action in this dense and lengthy scene develops Mary's deepening perversion of the power she thinks she has gained in the men's world as well as shows her own realization of this fact. She races "hags" with Mr. Manners and, still compelled to defy his condescension, she challenges him to bet four thousand pounds, which is all of her money, as Mrs. Temptwell cautions her. When Mr. Manners' hag wins the race, Mary refuses Mrs. Temptwell's advice:

> MRS. TEMPTWELL: Don't give in to him. He likes you. Burst into tears.
> MARY: What? Turn female now? (91)

Although Mary displays determination to remain on a par with the men, she does not do so without recognizing the extent of her own and other's corruption within the patriarchal and capitalist world. After losing the race Mary releases her anger and remorse at this recognition in a poignant display of cruelty against the old woman who represents three oppressed groups at once as a *poor, elderly woman*:

> OLD WOMAN: Please, Miss.
> MARY: Let's go.
> OLD WOMAN: I ran for you.
> MARY: And lost. Don't touch me.
> OLD WOMAN: I've been ill. Be kind.
> MARY: Why? Look around. Do you see kindness anywhere? Where is it?
> OLD WOMAN: Give me something.

MARY: I'll give you something priceless. Have you heard of knowledge?
(*She takes the whip and beats her.*)
There is no kindness. The world is a dry place.
OLD WOMAN: Please.
MARY: What, you want more?
(*She beats her again. The* OLD WOMAN *falls.*)
Have I hurt her?
(*She bends over her.*)
I've seen her before. Or was it her sister? Why do you all stare at me? She was standing outside church. My father told me to give her some money. He gave me a coin. I gave her the coin, smiling. She smiled. I smiled more kindly. My father smiled. I followed his glance and saw a lady and a young man, her son. They were smiling. My father gave me another coin. I moved closer to her, my steps lit by everyone's smiles. I remember watching the movement of my wrist as I put the coin in her hand. I smiled at its grace. (*Pause.*) Was that better? Tell me, was that better? (91-92)

Compounding the previous display with Sophie, Mary recognizes and demonstrates the selfish and exploitative injustices of both male sexual domination and class domination. Her ribald exploration of, and experimentation with, the world outside her father's house challenges and exposes the covert encoding of class and gender, showing falseness and levels of exploitation which Wertenbaker suggests are inherent to maintaining binary structures of power and oppression. She comes to understand her own role in the maintenance of this polarity as she points out the artifice in acts of kindness of the rich, epitomized by her handing a poor woman a coin while indulging in her own gracefulness. With this potent speech Wertenbaker economically elucidates the critical perspective of Mary's story. She punctuates the impact of the speech by placing it just before the play's interval, leaving a necessary break for reexamination and assimilation of the complex

dynamic of class and gender abberations just presented.

The opening stage directions for the third act describe the setting and circumstances Mary has come to in the unspecified lapse in time since the games den:

> *Vauxhall Gardens at night.* MARY *and* MRS. TEMPTWELL *stand in the dark, waiting. Music and lights in the background.* MARY *has a rounded stomach under dirty clothes.* (93)

The image already conveys how Mary has transformed in both class and gender delineation: she is poor, dirty, and pregnant with the pox, and here she hungrily waits outside the place where she might once have been on the inside, the upper-class setting of Vauxhall Gardens. Her pregnancy signals her inability to completely escape womanhood. Although her physiology does enslave her in this respect, the pregnancy occurred by way of her new-found sexual freedom. In spite of this freedom, Mary discovers a paradox in that the breaking of social codes can cause other forms of entrapment. Lamenting the perverse circumstances of her pregnancy, she asks Mrs Temptwell, "Why is it the one time I had no pleasure [from sex] my body decided to give life? What's the meaning of that?" (94) Mary is forced to physically realize the paradox and contradiction of "the world as it is" with "no illusions" (72) as she agreed with Mrs. Temptwell at the beginning of her journey. Despite Mrs. Temptwell's increased hostility towards Mary since she wasted all their money, she still accompanies her, suggesting that she has no alternative to even these wretched circumstances. Ironically, Mary still impetuously commands Mrs. Temptwell, ignoring their equalized social status. Here, she demands a story, "Distract me, damn you.

Tell me your story" (94). Mrs. Temptwell continues her scheme of exposing class oppression and chooses to tell Mary the story of how her grandmother was accused and hung for witchcraft by Mary's uncle, concluding the story with: "She asked for justice, he heard a witch's spell" (95). This begins to impact on Mary as she ponders the nature of power and crime, pointing to the possibility of their social construction:

> How interesting to have so much power and still so much fear....Tell me, Mrs. Temptwell, are we imitators by nature wishing to do what we see and hear? Or is every crime already in the human heart, dormant, waiting only to be tickled out? (95)

The thought, however, is immediately curtailed by the entrance of Giles, suggesting that Mary needs to experience more before she may come to some provisional answers to the gnawing questions.

When Giles enters with Sophie and is confronted by Mrs. Temptwell's pitch for Mary ("she's fanciful and clever" [96]), he iterates a prevalent attitude of men in the play towards women: "I want a woman, not a personality" (96). He is drawn to Sophie's docility over Mary's conversation, her "greatest charm" (96), which he is ironically responsible for encouraging. As Mary unbuttons Giles and gives her sexual service, she tells him about the graces of womanhood, echoing Mrs Temptwell's cynical, undercutting intentions expressed in her first scene:

> ...Men often tell me I remind them of their daughters. You look sad, Sir, is your daughter dead? Did she die of a chill? That happens with women of graceful breeding, the blood becomes too polite to flow through the body. As long as she died young, men prefer that....(97)

Completing both her speech and sex, Mary reveals herself to Giles,

but he denies her, saying simply, "You're a whore" (98). Mary responds to Giles' implication with philosophical rhetoric which resembles a riddle, yet truly articulates the covert criteria of their relationship:

> Is a daughter not a daughter when she's a whore? Or can she not be your daughter? Which words are at war here: whore, daughter, my? I am a daughter, but not yours, I am your whore but not your daughter. You dismiss the 'my' with such ease, you make fatherhood an act of grace, an honour I must buy with my graces, which you withdraw as soon as I disgrace you. (98)

Giles' attitude suggests that being or not being a daughter is culturally determined by correct behaviour and actions. He is unable to understand that Mary chooses the real world, with all its pain and contradiction, to her entrapped life in his home, nor can he comprehend her appeal to abolish the objectifying and possessive connotation of her being "his" daughter. Mary reasserts her independence by rejecting Giles' offer to take her back if she conforms to her former feminine identity. However, she is forced to modify her assertion, for she still needs her father's money to maintain her independence and is thus reduced to bribing him with threats of revealing herself to his "powerful friends...supping in [the] gardens" (99). The dependencies which are culturally forced upon Mary on the basis of gender are shown to be insidious and pervasive despite her radical efforts of resistance.

The following two scenes (act 3, scenes 2 and 3) contrast with each other in distinguishing between the contrived and manipulative discourse of those in power and the simple and direct discourse of the poor. First, Sophie meets Jack, a poor cobbler.

Their exchange of very few words acutely conveys the understanding and solidarity between them, based in their common feeling of oppression. Yet, although they connect by a sense of class unity, at the same time their discourse shows traditional gender difference as Jack directs their interaction and Sophie simply affirms and submits to his words:

> JACK: Hungry?
> SOPHIE: Yes.
> (*Gives her some bread.*)
> JACK: Here. Good?
> SOPHIE: Yes.
> JACK: Stole it.
> SOPHIE: Yes?
> JACK: Dangerous. But not wrong.
> SOPHIE: No.
> JACK: Come here.
> SOPHIE: Yes. (101)

In the same setting of Vauxhall Gardens, except in the lit dining area rather than the shadows inhabited by Sophie and Jack, Mr. Manners and Lord Gordon discuss how Lord Gordon may be installed as a political ploy. While Lord Gordon still wants to do anything which makes him known, Mr. Manners reveals his covert means of ordering society:

> MR. MANNERS: Real power prefers to remain invisible.
> LORD GORDON: I wouldn't mind not having the power. Just make me visible. Notorious. (101)

Their discourse follows a pattern of expressions of false modesty and hidden agendas expressed by Mr. Manners and overt and absurd egocentrism shown by Lord Gordon. Stoic attitudes prevalent in patriarchal, conservative politics resonate from Mr. Manners' love of "natural order" and fear of change. This scene, set in juxtaposition with the sparse exchange between Sophie and Jack,

suggests an insidious difference between controllers and controlled: the language of power is contrived and manipulative and appears monolithic, and is therefore difficult to recognize and undermine by those who speak a simple language. This contrast of discourses also initiates the power dynamics in the ensuing scenes of class exploitation.

In a similar way, the next scene between Mary and Sophie contrasts modes of expression, which in this case point to gender variation between the women. Bored and feverish, Mary attempts to engage in a dialectic with Sophie about life and cruelty. However, Sophie, showing the working-class pragmatism she shares with Jack, fails to give the intellectual or philosophical response Mary wants. While Mary torments herself by recognizing paradox and contradiction in the world ("...tell me how in this perfectly ordered universe you explain the chaos of the human soul..." [103]), Sophie protects herself from such despair by imaginatively transcending and simplifying painful circumstances:

> MARY: What do you think of life?
> SOPHIE: I hope it will be long.
> MARY: Are you pretending to be stupid?
> SOPHIE: I don't understand, Miss Mary. (*Pause.*) I feel things.
> MARY: What do you feel for me? Hatred? Contempt? Don't be afraid, Sophie, answer.
> SOPHIE: I don't feel -- that way. I feel the cold. And the heat even more than the cold.
> MARY: Sophie!
> SOPHIE: I don't have time to think the way you do....
> MARY: ...What did you feel in the gambling den, servicing my pleasures? What did you feel?
> SOPHIE: I don't know. I can't remember. Sometimes I don't feel I'm there. It could be someone else. And I'm walking in the fields....(105)

Wertenbaker indeed sets up a dialectic in this scene by presenting

the two characters' opposing means of dealing with pain. The contrast also positions Sophie as a measure of how far Mary transgresses her expected gender delineation: while Sophie passively withstands oppression, Mary actively resists and, paradoxically, enforces oppression. The discussion with Sophie seems to put an end to Mary's moment of introspection as the scene concludes with Mary reassuming her imitation of patriarchal endeavour: she decides to follow the path of men again and hence instigates her most overt political phase.

The next short scene with Jack provides a key moment of clarity for Mary in which she recognizes the paralleled problems of patriarchal and capitalist persecution. Responding to Jack's speech about every human's need for freedom, Mary is able to draw from her recent experience when she says,

> I know the humiliation of being denied equality, Jack, and that it is a dignity due to all, men and women, rich and poor. (107)

However, with her hasty initiation into the political realm, Mary loses sight of that brief visionary moment and becomes blinded by the thrill of power. When she and Jack are blocked by the guard in front of the Houses of Parliament, Mary employs her rhetorical skill, which is effective until she is actually admitted inside. When her political agitating is curtailed by Mr. Manners and the action escalates to rioting and mayhem in the next three scenes, Mary expresses the essence of her transformed and corrupted condition when she says: "I don't understand. I feel so powerful I can't think any more" (120). Within this context of political

manipulation and exploitation, Mr. Manners puts into effect his notion of invisible power as he discreetly pushes Mary to instigate the destruction. The dynamic in their relationship echoes and magnifies that of Mary and Giles in the play's opening scene where she is moulded by her father. In these relationships Wertenbaker suggests that Mary cannot escape the oppressive form of power so long as she is associated with patriarchal intervention.

Drawing the play to its idealistic end, Wertenbaker makes Mary gain her final piece of knowledge from the three people she has rejected and/or exploited throughout her journey. The collective impact of Mrs. Temptwell's, Giles' and Sophie's reprimanding her extreme actions[36] causes Mary to at least provisionally reconcile the social, political and gender differences among them and within herself by seeing the situation from a number of perspectives. Furthermore, she reclaims the inescapable part of her womanhood by deciding to keep her own child ("I can look after what I've generated." [125]), whom she had given to Sophie. The last lines of the final scene suggests a feminist vision of the new world as Mary obliquely indicates her daughter as the source of her hope for change.[37]

In the broadest sense, the story of Mary's traverse through

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[36] See GILES, p. 122; SOPHIE, p. 125; MRS. TEMPTWELL, p. 126.

[37] This ending is only in the second edition of the play from which I am working. The first edition has a longer final scene wherein Mary and Sophie dialogue more extensively about learning to understand the world; in that first edition there is no final reference to Mary's daughter.

the streets and dens of London is deconstructive of both gender and class because she uncovers culturally repressed elements of herself and she uncovers hidden aspects which form the dominant culture; she discovers the oppressive and corrupt underside which supports political "order" as it is defined by Mr. Manners. Specific deconstructive aspects include the parodied representation of Lord Exrake and Lord Gordon: the parody points out the absurdity of their sexual exploits and their frivolous self-importance, which clearly amounts to very little in the political realm of the story. As I have suggested, Wertenbaker's choice to specifically parody these characters is essentially consistent with history, for the aristocracy were indeed undermined by the middle class during the eighteenth century. Another important deconstructive aspect lies within the relationship between Mary and Giles. The father-daughter relationship is demystified, for it is shown to be an association which is determined by correct, conforming behaviour rather than inherent relation.

Perhaps the most complex deconstructive treatment is within the dynamic of the three women, Mary, Mrs. Temptwell and Sophie. They are represented in explicitly varying gender constitutions and in this regard suggest that differences of class or region may override and dissipate commonality of sex. For instance, Mary's identity is constituted by the following characteristics: youth, wealth, intellect, the urban setting, feminine and masculine qualities, and she shifts through roles as oppressor and oppressed. Mrs. Temptwell is constituted by maturity, poverty and the working-

class, cunning, rural and urban settings, perhaps more masculine then feminine qualities, class-consciousness, and she too shifts between oppressor and oppressed. Sophie is young, poor, simple and intuitive, rural, feminine, and oppressed by both men and women of both classes. Mrs. Temptwell's embittered class-consciousness is the dominant force behind her actions and compels her to use whatever cruel means necessary to achieve her goal of vengeance. Mary's intellect is perhaps her most forceful characteristic, combined with selfish curiosity, a function of being wealthy and bored, which causes her to seek knowledge and experience at the expense of human exploitation and waste. Sophie's dominant characteristic is clearly her submissiveness which creates her role as the exploited conduit for virtually every other character's goals or desires. Given these significant differences among the three characters, it indeed seems implausible that they would find solidarity in womanhood. Wertenbaker asserts the feminist notion which holds that women are not a homogeneous group who are necessarily united in being victims of patriarchal oppression, but rather constitute a heterogeneous group who are also capable of imposing tactics of patriarchal oppression on each other.

Heterogeneity is also a manifest part of the total class and gender dynamic in the play. Thus, Wertenbaker creates a complex, interchanging and shifting network of relationships, which by the very fact that they are difficult to chart exemplify their deconstructedness: there are no clear binary delineations between characters because their individual complex of delineations obscure

simple polarization.

The play's central theme is similar to that of The Love of the Nightingale: it suggests the importance of recognizing the human world, with its horror and contradiction, even if it is incomprehensible, rather than turning a blind eye on problems and contributing to their perpetuation. Mary iterates this theme in her speech about the contradiction in the "kindness" shown by the rich to the poor, poignantly exemplified in her story about giving the old woman a coin as an act of vanity rather then care. Related thematic ideas are linked to the project of deconstruction. For example, exploring the hidden dimensions of power and revealing its invisible (and blind) coercive function -- as Mary discovers during the height of the riots -- is stressed. Thematic implications also emerge by the deconstruction of gender norms which compound and resonate by being decontextualized within the play's historical period. Through Mrs. Temptwell a theme develops about revenge and manipulation resulting in deepening forms of oppression; she discovers this when Mary takes her journey to destructive ends far beyond what Mrs. Temptwell had intended when she first provoked Mary onto the streets. Finally, in relation to the play's thematic line, the inconclusive end of the play implies that we can only search and ask questions and that this in itself is a manifestation of hope which is better than complete despair. Mary seems to affirm this in the final scene when she expresses her hope:

> I'm certain that when we understand it all, it'll be simpler, not more confusing. One day we'll know how to love this world. (130)

Within the dramatic text of Mary Traverse Wertenbaker sets up poignant images which heighten the semiotics of the performance text. The specific level of semiotic communication which I am referring to is the staged corporeal actions which are integral to the dramatic discourse in several ways: by supporting and emphasizing, by supplementing and by contrasting to create ironic incongruence. Some key examples follow.

There are three points in the play where Mary performs under constrictive observation by a character who tries to impose authority over her. The compounded semiotic of Mary speaking to an empty chair while Giles oversees (act 1, scene 1), of Mary becoming sexually initiated while observed by Mrs. Temptwell (act 2, scene 3), and of Mary gambling at cards with Mr. Manners watching her every move (act 2, scene 4), suggests that the world in which she moves will not let her attain true independence. Whether normative or transgressive, her actions are constantly undercut by various expectations which are forced on her. Through Giles in the first scene the semiotic communicates that she acts not out of her own volition, but out of instruction, which clearly constricts her own impulse (her desire to break out of the confinement of prescribed repartee). Mrs. Temptwell's voyeuristic observation of Mary with Mr. Hardlong suggests several meanings: Mrs. Temptwell's envy of Mary's brazen sexuality, her distrust of Mary and perhaps Mr. Hardlong in having too much pleasure, and her vengeful desire to see Mary experience pain. Mr. Manner's persistent peering over Mary's shoulder suggests that he needs to know exactly what she

does in order for him to maintain his position of insidious control, especially as she is a trespasser of male prerogative: in effect, he treats her like a criminal on probation. All three instances of Mary under such observation suggest a deeply entrenched distrust of her (as a young, attractive, wealthy, woman) and a surreptitious plot to prevent her from attaining independence. The "hag race" in the final section of the games den scene (act 2, scene 4) emphasizes the extent and expense of Mary's deviation. The image of two elderly, poor women physically struggling for the vanity of Mary in competition with Mr. Manners epitomizes exploitation of the politically powerless as a means of maintaining patriarchal power. Furthermore, it emphasizes the potential women have for appropriating and imposing patriarchal oppression on other women.

An effective visual semiotic suggested in the dramatic text, which can be overlooked in a reading alone, are the pregnant bellies of both Mary and Sophie. Initially, their pregnancies function as a reminder of their enslavement to female biology, invoked through sexual exploitation: for Sophie, by rape, and for Mary, by her own sexual abandon. Sophie's pregnancy from rape also denotes her constant victimization. Moreover, the image of Lord Exrake letching after a single, pregnant young women emphasizes the cruelty of her predicament. Mary's pregnant belly (visible from the beginning of act 3 with Giles in Vauxhall Gardens to the end of the riots in act 3, scene 9) functions ironically as an incongruous image within the social settings she enters: first, as she whores

for her father in Vauxhall Gardens, and then as she plays the leading role in rabble-rousing and political mayhem. In these contexts her appearance deconstructs the idea of maternity as a condition requisite of domestication, defying confining cultural norms of motherhood. Considered from another perspective, her maternal appearance during the riots undermines her attempt to imitate patriarchal leadership for her body betrays such an attempt. In constructing (and deconstructing) these images of femaleness, Wertenbaker suggests that there is indeed a fundamental female experience, which is *not* dependent on culturally defined feminine qualities, and which may connote either positive or negative meanings.

The scenes of explicit sexual action are semiotically striking within the dramatic text as well as the performance text. Those scenes are: Mary with Mr. Hardlong (act 2, scene 3), Mary with Sophie (act 2, scene 4) and Mary with Giles (act 3, scene 1). In the dramatic text, the sexual acts emphasize the extent of Mary's gender transgression by her systematic breaking of sexual taboos: first, exploiting sex as a business transaction (and a woman hiring a male prostitute), second, displaying lesbian sex, and third, initiating incest. Through the performance, the explicit sex is disruptive of the historical context because it radically breaks with conventions associated with eighteenth-century dramatization. While the comedy of manners of that era is indeed characteristically fraught with sexual innuendo, Mary Traverse graphically enacts the sex, thus decontextualizing the story within

that historical dramatic context.

Another example of performance semiotics is contained in Wertenbaker's stage directions. Again, while this point can be easily overlooked from a reading of the text alone, it can make a significant allusion in performance. During the gambling den scene, a stage direction states, "MR. HARDLONG *comes on. The men ignore him*" (88). It is important to note that Wertenbaker says the men *"ignore"* Hardlong as opposed to 'do not see' him. The implication is that he provides prostitution services for these men and his presence in the den causes unwanted self-consciousness of their homosexuality, which is particularly inept in the masculine den context. This semiotic is a subtle but pointed example of the way in which Wertenbaker takes detailed account of the performance text in her playwriting.

There are three additional points about the staging and performance of the play to be considered. First, the appropriate choice for costuming, as implied by the text, is authentic-looking costuming of the late eighteenth century. This is implicit because the play is firmly grounded in the historical context, and therefore the performance needs to visually emphasize this context. Moreover, the scene settings spanning the whole play vary so much that it seems practically convoluted, and dramaturgically ineffective, to attempt complete, realistic settings: thus, the costumes serve an important function in establishing the settings. Furthermore, as part of the setting and character semiotics, costumes are crucial for distinguishing class differences;

particularly as they must emphasize Mary's significant transitions of class delineation.

The second point regarding the staging/performance is that, similar to New Anatomies, characters are written in varying degrees of parody which need emphasis and distinction in their enactment. For example, Lord Gordon and Lord Exrake are the most overt parodies; while Mary is parodied during her opening scenes in her father's house she later becomes a more dramatically complex character. Thus, it seems important to the play, in terms of both the plot and the deconstruction project, that the critical intentions Wertenbaker has for each character are clearly delineated in the style of representation.

My final concern about the way in which the play is manifested on stage is the question of how graphic the sexual and violent actions should be. According to the dramatic text, particularly as I have discussed it in its deconstructive aspects, those key moments, where cultural/sexual taboos are broken, demand explicit enactment. If these points are not graphically represented, then the important break with the historical context will not work effectively. In other words, with the teasing innuendo in the language, there needs to be a bold break from mere suggestion which demystifies the provocation of words and actually shows the true acts of desire and perversion, and their consequences.

Wertenbaker portrays Mary Traverse with critical sympathy,

for she draws Mary as both a cause and a victim of the oppression and destruction which occurs in the plot. Her experiences of "rude awakening" to the world and to her own behaviour within it function as the aspects of the plot which deconstruct and "problematize" the correlated issues of gender, class and patriarchal politics. I say problematize because the play brings the issues to a chaotic climax and intentionally fails to point a clear way through the turmoil. Nevertheless, Wertenbaker does, as I have mentioned, suggest a preliminary remedy for the problems which have been uncovered over the course of the play: the last scene, where Mary is together with the other three main characters, implies that the will for forgiveness among the characters forms the foundation upon which Mary's "hope" develops. Idealistic as it may be, this ending does point out that differences such as gender and class need to be *acknowledged* and reconciled before any positive change may happen. The deconstructive project within the play constitutes a crucial step towards making such recognition and understanding possible.

CHAPTER FOUR

GENDER, CULTURE AND MYTH IN THE LOVE OF THE NIGHTINGALE

The Love of the Nightingale was first performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company at The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon, on October 28th, 1988. Like the other two works of this study, The Love of the Nightingale is an adaptation of an historic source; in this case, the Philomela myth of Ovid's Metamorphoses.[38] Wertenbaker adapts the story together with classical Greek theatrical conventions in such a way that she uses original characteristics, yet defamiliarizes them. The play is similar to New Anatomies in that it emphasizes the correlation of gender and culture. The treatment of gender in both plays illustrates the premise espoused by feminist critic Teresa de Lauretis that a subject is constituted in gender not by sexual difference alone, but rather across languages and cultural representations.[39]

Nightingale differs from New Anatomies (and Mary Traverse) in a variety of ways. It explores cross-cultural experience through

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[38] Ovid, Metamorphoses, trans. Mary M. Innes (London: Penguin Books, 1955) 146-153.

[39] Teresa de Lauretis, Technologies of Gender (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) 2.

imposed displacement rather than self-chosen displacement. The deconstruction of gender within the story is less overt than it is in the other two plays. Characters do not make transgressions which obscure traditional gender roles and relations between men and women. Rather, gender and culture are deconstructed because Wertenbaker explicitly shows their mechanisms, making the cause and effect of their problems and conflicts evident. A significant distinction this play has from the others is that the deconstruction of gender/culture is part of another deconstruction project. In Nightingale Wertenbaker looks at gender within the framework of deconstructing the mythic form of the story. In effect, the play is a deconstructivist retelling of the myth. Just as her other works show gender as a human and social construction rather than a pre-determined state, so does Nightingale stress the human forces which construct and drive the events of the myth. Wertenbaker challenges the inevitability of myth, showing that it, like any human conflict, is the result of certain choices and misunderstandings which stem from cultural (including gender) differences. In short, she makes gender deconstruction an integral part of her project of demystifying myth.

The story of Nightingale begins when the Athenian sisters Procne and Philomele are about to be separated by imposed marriage. Procne is given by their father, King Pandion, to Tereus of Thrace as reward for his help in winning the war for Athens. But before Procne leaves she secures her younger sister's promise to visit her in Thrace. Five years later, bored and lonely in her husband's

country, Procne convinces Tereus to sail to Athens to bring back Philomele. Philomele is eager to go to Thrace with Tereus, but Pandion hesitates in allowing his youngest daughter to sail to a distant and foreign land. After deliberating over possible ominous signs given in a play which they see, Pandion is convinced to let Philomele go. While in Athens Tereus becomes infatuated with the passionate Philomele; on the ship sailing to Thrace, this becomes an increasing lustful desire. Innocent of such lust, Philomele ignores his advances and continues to treat him as a brother, talking only of her excitement to see her sister. Tereus lands on a desolate beach of Thrace, far from Procne in the city. Desiring Philomele, he lies to her, saying Procne has died, trying to convince her that she must now love him; Philomele resists and demands in vain to see her sister's body. After a month of brooding desire, still with no response from Philomele, Tereus rapes her. Tereus then goes to Procne and lies to her, saying Philomele is dead. When he returns to Philomele, she demands to know the reason for his brutal treatment. When he fails to answer her, she becomes enraged and condemns his violence, threatening to tell all the people of Thrace of their leader's treachery. Tereus resorts to violence again and cuts out Philomele's tongue so that she cannot speak out against him. She is then imprisoned in the remote woods until five years later when she emerges in the city of Thrace with three life-size dolls she has made representing herself, Tereus and Procne. During the Bacchanal revels of Procne and Thracian women, Philomele intrudes and violently re-enacts her rape and tongue-

cutting with the dolls, finally revealing her story. Procne first questions Philomele, reminding her of her once-provocative character. Then, believing her sister, Procne reunites with her, and they wreak revenge by killing Tereus' (and Procne's) son, Itys. When Tereus sees what has happened and still cannot explain his violence and deceit, he pursues the sisters, but before he catches them they are all transformed into birds. Tereus becomes a hoopoe, Procne a swallow, and Philomele a nightingale. In the final scene, the birds are joined by Itys and the play concludes with singing of the nightingale.

Wertenbaker opens the play emphasizing gender difference. Scene 1 begins with the Male Chorus introducing the context of the action in a single word: "War".[40] Immediately two soldiers enact war in a physical and verbal fight; in so doing, they suggest a microcosm of the patriarchal and militaristic powers which instigate the ensuing action. The language of the soldiers suggests an insidious negative attitude toward women when they crudely equate "woman" with animals and body parts as terms of offence:

> FIRST SOLDIER: You cur!
> SECOND SOLDIER: You cat's whisker.
> FIRST SOLDIER: You flea's foot.
> SECOND SOLDIER: You particle.
> (*Pause.*)
> You son of a bitch.
> FIRST SOLDIER: You son of a lame hyena.
> SECOND SOLDIER: You son of a bleeding whore.
> FIRST SOLDIER: You son of a woman! (1)

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[40] Timberlake Wertenbaker, The Love of the Nightingale and The Grace of Mary Traverse (London: Faber and Faber, 1989) 1. All future citations from the play are taken from this edition; the page number will be parenthetically inserted within the text.

The Male Chorus explain the scene of war as the "inevitable background" which "establishes the place and perspective" (2), as well as further suggesting the danger of the patriarchal-militaristic context, for the fight between the soldiers ends in death. The final comment implies that women have refuge from war as the Male Chorus direct attention to the Athenian palace where the sisters discuss "life's charms and the attractions of men" (2). Thus, the plot is initiated from the patriarchal perspective of war, misogyny and presumption about women's sanctuary from these dangers.

In scene 2, Procne and Philomele watch the soldiers fighting outside their father's palace as they carry on a dialogue which reveals their respective attitudes towards men and thus their characteristic differences. Philomele's language is juxtaposed against the crude insults just expressed by the soldiers. She speaks with naive yet erotic excitement about men, using sensual animal imagery to express her sexual desires, contrasting with the soldier's use of animal reference as violation. For example:

> ...He's so handsome I want to wrap my legs around him. ...Look at the sweat running down his body. My feet will curl around the muscles of his back....I feel such things, Procne, such things. Tigers, rivers, serpents, here, in my stomach, a little below. I'll tell you how the serpent uncurls inside me if you tell me how it's done. (2)

Procne's discourse contrasts with Philomele's as she shows her stoical pragmatism and conforming obedience in trying to silence or suppress Philomele's passion. Procne's first line of the scene is, "Don't say that, Philomele."; then, to Philomele's persistent

questions about men she replies, "Look: they fight" (2). Throughout the scene, their dialogue follows a pattern of naive, passionate expression from Philomele and serious suppression from Procne. While Philomele shows her unbounded love and curiosity about men and the world outside the palace, Procne is preoccupied with how the rules of the world will affect her: her impending marriage and its implication of leaving her family and home for a foreign place. Procne reveals her conception of the world and the way she is supposed to conduct herself in it; she reflects education and training which prescribes her role in the patriarchal order. She accepts the conditions of war ("Athens is at war, men must die" [4]) while Philomele is shocked and upset by the notion; Procne is superstitious that unbounded self-expression will provoke the gods ("Quiet, Philomele! Never say you're happy. It wakes the gods and then they look at you and that is never a good thing" [3]); and she resigns herself to parental (in fact, patriarchal) authority over her marriage ("They know best" [4]). Procne knows the rules of the world, while Philomele unknowingly resists those rules as she is consumed by passionate enthusiasm for its mysteries. Procne does, however, show some resistance to her marriage by committing to solidarity with her sister in asking Philomele's promise to visit her, thus discouraging her total isolation in marriage. As the play shows, it is this act of mild resistance to patriarchal rule which incites the story of the myth.

Scene 3 encapsulates that world which Procne prepares herself to enter. The Male Chorus explains that Athens wins the war

with the help of Tereus of Thrace. King Pandion iterates the "rules" of their relationship, which have a direct impact on Procne as she becomes the object of the diplomatic exchange:

> No liberated country is ungrateful. That is a rule. You will take what you want from our country. It will be given with gratitude. We are ready. (4)

Tereus asks for Procne by implication when he says that he wants to take some of Athenian culture back to Thrace and that he believes culture is kept by women. The ritual is emphasized as one specifically between the men without allowance for intervention from the women, as the Queen already knows and both Procne and Philomele learn:

> KING PANDION: She's yours, Tereus. Procne -
> PROCNE: But, Father -
> KING PANDION: Your husband.
> PROCNE: Mother -
> QUEEN: What can I say?
> KING PANDION: I am only sad that you will live so far away.
> PHILOMELE: Can I go with her?
> QUEEN: Quiet, child. (5)

However, the Male Chorus undercuts the simplicity of the transaction when they explain that it did not happen as quickly as just presented, but that "It took months and much indirect discourse" (5). Their interjection functions as a disruption of the mythical narrative, suggesting that it is not a seamless story, but that confusion and contradiction surrounds political arrangements. For instance, the Male Chorus add that Tereus's men had become unruly during their stay in Athens and therefore Pandion is eager for them to leave; thus, the Male Chorus deconstruct his graciousness by revealing the underlying motivation. Moreover,

despite her father's apparent regret in sending her away, Procne is considered expendable as a conduit for political diplomacy.

Scene 4 is set five years later in Thrace, where Procne laments and broods about her feeling of cultural alienation among the Thracian women, who are represented by the Female Chorus. Wertenbaker highlights cultural diversity among the women, emphasizing difference primarily through their respective modes of discourse. The language of the Female Chorus is intuitive and lyrical and at times fragmented. In assigning them this distinctive discourse which is often characterized as feminine,[41] Wertenbaker emphasizes a specifically feminine perspective whenever they speak:

> HERO: It is difficult to come to a strange land.
> HELEN: You will always be a guest there, never call it your own, never rest in the kindness of history.
> ECHO: Your story intermingled with events, no. You will be outside.
> IRIS: And if it is the land of your husband can you even say you have chosen it?
> JUNE: She is not one of us. (6)

Oblivious to the empathy of the Female Chorus, Procne repeats her lament, "Where have all the words gone?" (6-7), and insists that she cannot connect with what she describes as the Thracian women's inverted discourse:

> IRIS: We speak the same language, Procne.
> PROCNE: The words are the same, but point to different things. We aspire to clarity in sound, you like the silences in between.

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[41] Feminine discourse is often described as "fragmented", "intuitive" and "contiguous". The following address the point: Sue-Ellen Case, Feminism and Theatre (Basingstoke: MacMillan Publishers, 1988).; Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," Signs 1,4 (1976): 875-893.; Deborah Tannen, You Just Don't Understand: Men and Women in Conversation (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990).

HERO: We offered to initiate you.
PROCNE: Barbarian practices. I am an Athenian: I know the truth is found in logic and happiness lies in the truth. (7)

While the Female Chorus show experiential and intuitive knowledge of the world, Procne conforms to the educated aphorisms of her Athenian culture; she iterates her belief in logic as though it comes directly from her formal lessons rather than her own experience. Wertenbaker implies that this cultural muffler set between the discourses of the Female Chorus and Procne is the underlying cause of her disregard for their expressions of foreboding about her wish for Philomele to visit Thrace ("There are no words for forebodings....We are only brushed by possibilities" [8].). Thus, the ensuing events of the myth are partly shaped by the cultural difference between these women.

In the following scenes the problem of overlooking warning signs is developed as characters are impeded by their ethnocentric (cultural and gendered) perspectives. Scene 5 shows Tereus in Athens presenting Procne's request for Philomele. Set in a theatre where a condensed performance of Hippolytus is interspersed with the main action, Pandion states that the play will help him make a decision about Philomele going to Thrace. But just as he is about to respond to the apparent warning signals of the tragedy, he is convinced by Philomele that she is not synonymous with the characters of the play and should therefore be allowed to go. Thus, Pandion ignores his own source of potential advice and concedes to logic. In the meantime, Tereus becomes intrigued and then infatuated with the lively and passionate expressions of Philomele

as she responds to the play. It becomes clear in scene 13 that here Tereus misconstrues Philomele and takes her imagistic and innocent language for her literal desire. For example, he hears:

> How beautiful to love like that! The strength of my limbs is melting away....You see, Tereus, love is a god and you cannot control him....When you love you want to imprison the one you love in your words, in your tenderness. (10,11)

Within this scene, Pandion and Tereus reflect different discourses of male culture: Pandion succumbs to the Athenian discourse of logic and unemotional decisiveness; Tereus shows an intuitive and impulsive discourse, similar to the Thracian woman (though manifested quite differently). As the story turns out, each of the men are misguided by their respective modes of understanding. Thus, Wertenbaker points to further empirical causal elements concealed within the mythical framework.

Scene 6 is entirely narrated by the Male Chorus, who chart the journey sailing north, emphasizing the great distance from Athens and the cold, foreign sea. They underline the potentially volatile dynamic between Tereus and Philomele:

> MALE CHORUS: Philomele wonders at the beauty of the sea.
> MALE CHORUS: Tereus wonders at Philomele's beauty. (14)

The chorus then sketch in the threatening dramatic context of this dynamic when they explain that the six Athenian soldiers sent with Philomele disappear one dark night. Acknowledging, but essentially condoning the approaching danger, they "choose" to stand back and observe:

> MALE CHORUS: In the cold dawns, Tereus burns.
> MALE CHORUS: Does Philomele know? Ought we to tell her? We are here only to observe, journalists of

> an antique world, putting horror into words,
> unable to stop the events we will soon
> record. (14)

The Male Chorus thus contribute to the pattern of ignoring signs of encroaching trouble, for they choose to confine their actions within their role as narrators of a myth which they believe is predestined and therefore impossible to change.

Affirming the observations of the Male Chorus, scene 7 develops the dangerous circumstances surrounding Philomele on the ship with Tereus: the ship passes Mount Athos, where men kill all female beings; Tereus demands that the sails be taken down to lengthen the journey; Niobe tries to act on the Queen's order to never leave Philomele alone but is twice sent away and finally resigns herself to silence. Tereus attempts to talk intimately with Philomele, but she repeatedly refutes his attempts by diverting the conversation to Procne and her great excitement to see her sister, causing his desire to intensify in frustration. The scene stresses how unaware Philomele is of the potential danger, implying that her youthful vibrancy makes her blind to the danger. Hence, the theme of women being punished for expressing their desire is developed.

In scene 8 the Male Chorus interrupt the building action, suspending the narrative to speak about the meaning of myth and Philomele's story. They do not arrive at any conclusion, but they significantly agitate the mythic frame of the story. Their most poignant comment is in response to their own question "What is a myth?": "The oblique image of an unwanted truth, reverberating through time" (19). The comment suggests the timelessness of

Philomele's story, and its modern relevance; it also implies the pervasiveness of the content of myth. The discourse is implied as a remote guide to the mythical context of the play, yet the comments obscure understanding of the myth rather than explain it: They suggest, "there is no content without its myth", and that behind "every fold and twist of passion" (19) there lies a myth to be reconciled with. The notion that all human experience has its origin in myth is alluded to, but also obscured. Wertenbaker clearly implies a challenge by the ambiguity of the scene, pointing to the necessity of questioning the mechanisms of the myth.

Wertenbaker's use of the Male Chorus is indeed curious in this eighth scene. While deploying a familiar choral function of stepping outside the action to comment on it and provoke a certain audience response, she obfuscates the Male Chorus character delineation by briefly withholding their characteristic quality of denial. Instead they ask questions and purposely make the narrative more difficult to contend with. The effect seems to be that Wertenbaker herself is speaking to the audience through the chorus; again, not an uncommon use of chorus. However, it seems incongruous that she should use the *male* group of characters to speak through, given the play's feminist incentive. The justification for this dramaturgical choice may be that Wertenbaker seeks to constantly undercut the achievement of finding clear-cut meaning in the play; all is presented through a number of conflicting perspectives: there is no singular meaning. Therefore Wertenbaker shuns the obvious choice of speaking through the Female Chorus and instead

expands the dramaturgical potential of the Male Chorus. At the same time she makes it clear that scene 8 suspends the developments within the narrative, including the character of the Male Chorus.

Pointing back to the narrative yet remaining out of character, so to speak, at the end of scene 8, the Male Chorus comment on Procne's role as a key force behind the myth, and allude to the idea that the myth progresses by forces of human nature rather than pre-destined mythic force:

> ...And what about Procne, the cause perhaps, in any case the motor of a myth that leaves her mostly absent? (19-20)

Thus the scene ends with reference to the underlying project of the play: to point to the human causal links between the mythic events.

Scenes 9 and 10 juxtapose ways in which men and women deal with fear and uncertainty. In Scene 9 the Female Chorus press Procne further with their expressions of foreboding; but she is still unable to recognize the allusive warning signals in their language:

> HERO: I say danger, she thinks of earthquakes. Doesn't know the first meaning of danger is the power of a lord or master.[42]
> HELEN: That one is always in someone's danger.
> ECHO: In their power, at their mercy.
> JUNE: All service is danger and all marriage too. (20)

Although their image-based cognition of the world around them ("The world I see and the words I have do not match" [20]) is indeed pervasive, Procne lacks the "sympathy" which "images require" for

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[42] Wertenbaker does indeed take the first definition of "danger" from The Oxford English Dictionary, vol. IV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 240.

understanding. Frustrated and impatient by the cultural barrier around her, Procne further isolates herself from the Female Chorus, and in effect allows the myth to proceed: "Enough of your nonsense. Be silent" (21).

Scene 10 shows Tereus' soldiers, with the Male Chorus, waiting on the desolate beach of Thrace. Knowing that they should not question their leader, the soldiers struggle against their will to ask why they must wait. Asserting his military authority, Tereus silences the soldiers' questions (echoing Procne above) and demands their blind faith in his leadership. Responding, the Male Chorus display their contrasting instinct to the Female Chorus: "I wouldn't want to live in a world that's always shifting. Questions are like earthquakes. If you're lucky, it's just a rumble" (22). They justify Tereus's command as the best means for retaining peace and order: "We asked no more questions and at night, we slept soundly, and did not see:" (24) Thus, the Male Chorus represent a desire to avoid or conceal fear and uncertainty while the Female Chorus attempt to express and discover it.

The notion of turning a blind eye and deaf ear on danger and violation is emphasized repeatedly by the Male Chorus in the ensuing scenes as they utter variations of "we did not see". In this repetition they undermine their earlier decision to "be accurate and record". Thus, Wertenbaker systematically undercuts the credibility of the Male Chorus as representing an unbiased perspective. In so doing, she continues to dismantle their formal function as guides to the myth, emphasizing the narrative as a

process of human (and gendered) decisions.

Scenes 11, 12 and 13 escalate the action to the actual moment of danger and violation. On the desolate beach, Tereus pursues Philomele ("Why does he follow me everywhere?" [24]), clearly attempting in vain to communicate his desire, but trapped by his inability to find the words. Philomele appears to sense danger by this time, for she increasingly resists the approaches of Tereus: for every attempt he makes to talk intimately with her, she undercuts him by obsessively talking about Procne. Thus, his frustrated desire incites the first violation, his lying about Procne's death. His second act of violation occurs when he discovers Philomele befriending the Captain and in a fit of jealous rage kills the Captain, instantly punishing her for expressing her desire and leaving her in greater desolation. Finding it impossible to gain Philomele's attention through spoken language, Tereus resorts to physical coercion as his only source of irrefutable expression.

By scene 13 Philomele is clearly aware of the danger and becomes desperate, trying to call on Procne and the gods for help, and still tries to negate the imposing presence of Tereus by ignoring him. In a final attempt to gain her attention, Tereus reminds Philomele of the play they saw in Athens, showing his misunderstanding of the youthful passion she had shown:

> TEREUS: ...The play. I am Phaedra. (*Pause.*) I love you. That way.
> (*Silence.*)
> PHILOMELE: It is against the law....
> TEREUS: The power of the god is above the law. It began then, in the theatre, the chorus told me. I saw

the god and I loved you.
PHILOMELE: Tereus.
(*Pause.*)
I do not love you.
I do not want you.
I want to go back to Athens.
TEREUS: Who can resist the god? Those are your words.
Philomele. They convinced me, your words. (29)

When Philomele threatens Tereus by telling him he is being "frivolous" he again has no other means of asserting himself than through physical violence. Trying first to argue by Athenian logic that she must consent, Philomele finally shows fear which further provokes Tereus, inciting him to act out of the impulse he knows in war and leadership: "So, you are afraid. I know fear well. Fear is consent. You see the god and you accept" (30). Imposing his patriarchal-Thracian interpretation on Philomele's argument for consent, Tereus drags Philomele away and rapes her.

Philomele calls for help from Niobe who does not move but instead remembers the violation she and her sisters suffered at the hands of Athenians. Wertenbaker constructs a powerful dramatic dynamic by setting Niobe's statement of resignation to male violence against the screaming of Philomele in the background:

> So it's happened. I've seen it coming for weeks. I could have warned her, but what's the point?...Oh dear, oh dear, she shouldn't scream like that. It only makes it worse. Too tense. More brutal. Well I know. She'll accept it in the end. Have to. We do....(30)

Niobe's unwillingness to act in Philomele's defense is also an act of retribution against Athens for the rape and extinction of Niobe's own culture. In this regard, Philomele is also punished for belonging to the Athenian culture. Yet, at the same time, the scene emphasizes that being victims of rape is common among women across

cultures.

In scene 14 the consequence of Procne's self-imposed isolation from the Female Chorus is evident. Now anxious about Tereus's prolonged absence, she pleads with the Female Chorus to tell her what has happened, but they are unable (or unwilling) to express their feelings beyond saying "No", that he is not dead. As though affirming the dread implied by the silence of the Female Chorus, Tereus enters with bloodied hands. When Procne sees the blood, he can only lie and equivocate:

> TEREUS: A wild beast. Or god in disguise. Unnameable.
> PROCNE: My sister?
> TEREUS: (*After a brief pause*) Not here.
> PROCNE: No. (*Pause.*) Drowned?
> (*Pause.*)
> TEREUS: But I am here. (33)

Deferring the latent conflict and danger, the Male Chorus state that they will not comment on the scene just enacted, maintaining their blind-eye stance. A rare common moment between the Male and Female Choruses is suggested by their respective forms of withdrawal: both are silenced by the danger in the scene, both respond to the power of Tereus. Significantly, this is the last scene in which the Male Chorus plays a role, suggesting that the following action is too disturbing, thus prompting them to ignore it.

Tereus continues to wield his physical power over Philomele when she upsets his authority by threatening to expose his treachery to the people of Thrace. In cutting out her tongue he believes he has finally won Philomele because she is silent. By taking away her speech he thinks her only strength over him has

been removed, and so assumes his ownership of her: "You are mine. My sweet, my songless, my caged bird" (37).

In Scene 18, five years later, since Procne has accepted and adapted to Thracian culture and joins the women in their feast of Bacchus, Philomele reclaims her voice through physical expression. After seeing the enactment with the dolls, Procne hesitates before she believes Philomele's story:

> How can I know that was the truth?
> (*Pause.*)
> You were always wild. How do I know you didn't take him to your bed?...Desire always burnt in you....There's no shame in your eyes. Why should I believe you? (41)

The passion of Philomele's youth is still held against her as being provocative. While Procne makes this supposition on founded knowledge of men, Philomele is still indicted for simply expressing herself. When Procne does finally believe Philomele's story, the sisters are reunited and set out to avenge the lies and violation. It is fitting that it is within the context of the Thracian women's bacchic ritual that they get the chance to commit an uncommon act of cruelty: the bacchic setting allows the women carnal and violent expression. When Tereus discovers that Procne and Philomele have killed Itys, and he cannot answer for his actions of the past five years, he resorts once more to his own violent expression in trying to kill the sisters.

Seeming to gain an authoritative position by the revelation of events, the Female Chorus assert themselves as the new guides of the myth and complete the narration of scene 20:

> HERO: Tereus pursued the two sisters, but he never reached them. The myth has a strange end.

ECHO: No end.
IRIS: Philomele becomes a nightingale.
JUNE: Procne a swallow.
HELEN: And Tereus a hoopoe.
HERO: You might ask, why does the myth end that way?
IRIS: Such a transformation.
ECHO: Metamorphosis. (47-48)

Taking the place of the Male Chorus in their function of narrating from outside the story, the Female Chorus are emphasized as being antithetical to the men by pressing the need to reveal and question irrational atrocities. They suggest that struggling with questions is better than the price of silence. Their final statements and questions about rape and violation throughout time stress that the Philomele myth is part of an historic cycle; a direct link is made between the myth and contemporary life.

Although imaginary and ambiguous, the final scene 21 suggests itself as positive and hopeful. Philomele as a nightingale teaches Itys the socratic discourse of question and answer, yet when he asks her what "wrong" and "right" are, she can only respond by singing, having no final answer to the question, but implicitly defying the silence it may bring.

Essentially, Wertenbaker's play is a feminist revision of Ovid's myth: she develops Ovid's female characters, adds female characters and explicitly contrasts the discourses of the male and female characters. More specifically, her changes and additions reflect a complex of thematic concerns, such as: the construction of myth and its relevance to contemporary times; the impact of cross-cultural experience between and among women and men; gender

and cultural constitution as the basis of expression; and the danger of silence and refusal to question. Following are some important changes from Ovid's Metamorphoses and comment on the dramaturgical function of the changes.

The first scene, with Procne and Philomele watching soldiers in battle, is particular to the play, for Ovid's version begins as Pandion gives Procne to Tereus in marriage. The scene establishes the characteristics of the sisters, emphasizing their difference: Philomele's passion and Procne's obedience. The scene also underscores the friendship and loyalty between the sisters when Procne asks Philomele to promise to visit her after marriage. The Queen is an added character in the play: although she first seems obscure in the action, she is perceptive of the danger Philomele is exposed to and attempts to save her by ordering Niobe to keep watch over her on the voyage. The Queen is an example of Wertenbaker's embellished female perspective; like the Female Chorus, the Queen perceives things but is powerless to truly express and act on her knowledge. Procne's relationship with the Thracian women (the Female Chorus) is an addition, emphasizing cultural variation among the women, and developing the theme of ignoring warning signs through difference of perception of meaning. Another addition which works to underscore cultural difference is the play Hippolytus performed in Athens contrasting with the Thracian culture, as represented by Tereus, who says he prefers sport to theatre. The play-within-the-play is also an effective theatrical means of dramatic foreshadowing.

The voyage to Thrace is considerably extended and embellished for dramatic build. As I mentioned, the disappearance of the six Athenian soldiers points to the danger of Philomele's situation and suggests the power of Tereus. This is further emphasized when Tereus kills the Captain with whom Philomele attempts to seek companionship and sexual attraction. Moreover, Tereus's character is presented as far more complex than in Ovid, shown, for example, by his one-month delay on the beach before he actually acts. The complexity Wertenbaker assigns Tereus will be discussed in more depth.

Niobe is a character from another section of Metamorphoses (found in Book VI) transposed into Philomele's story. She represents both extreme female victimization, against which Philomele rebels, and the deepening cruelty surrounding Philomele when Niobe condones the rape and tongue-cutting.

Further enlarging the story, Wertenbaker makes five years pass instead of one year before Philomele reveals herself in Thrace. The extended elapsed time allows for characters to more feasibly change: Tereus becomes increasingly withdrawn; Procne finally adapts to female Thracian culture and has enough time to grow to love and trust Tereus and obscure the memory of Philomele. The five years also suggests a much larger and labour-intensive project for Philomele in making the dolls; she is implicitly changed to an obsessive character in having a singular purpose over the five-year period. The use of dolls for revealing the truth is substituted for the tapestry Philomele weaves in Ovid's version.

The doll enactment is, of course, theatrical and intensifies Philomele's urgency as she physically struggles to manipulate them.

The limitations of theatre are acknowledged in Wertenbaker's less gruesome representation of the murder of Itys: in Ovid Itys is cut up and served to Tereus for dinner and Philomele swings the child's head in Tereus's face. In curtailing the act of revenge, by making it less sensational, the sisters are represented as less mad and violent, giving their act more dramatic credibility. The final scene with the three birds and Itys is Wertenbaker's addition. It emphasizes the transformation as a new cycle with potential for discovery, as suggested by Philomele teaching Itys to question -- Itys being representative of the future as Helen reminds us, "A child is the future" (46).

The most significant changes Wertenbaker has made to the Metamorphoses story are her additions of new and multiple dimensions to both the story and its representation. First, by adding characters, and making characters more complex and dynamically effective, Wertenbaker takes their destiny out of the hands of "the Furies", or the gods, and gives it to the characters themselves, as existential mortals. Second, the changes reflect the transference of the story from literature, or oral tradition, to the stage. Wertenbaker clearly recognizes and exploits the language of theatre by, for example, substituting corporeal action for metaphysical actions. Third, the significant addition of the Male and Female Choruses creates a meta-narrative which frames and filters the whole play in such a way that both its mythic form and

content are presented in a critical light.

Deconstructing concepts of gender and culture are central to Wertenbaker's critical project in the play. As I have said, the deconstruction functions at a more subtle level in this play than in some of her other work. Gender and culture are deconstructed to the extent that Wertenbaker highlights difference and variation and in so doing challenges binary thinking. She executes this treatment in a variety of ways, some of which I have briefly mentioned: for instance, the juxtapositioning of men and women, Thracians and Athenians, brings into relief differences of cultures within genders and genders within cultures. At the same time, the juxtapositions stress how conflict may be borne out of disparity in basic perception and expression. A closer look at Wertenbaker's representations in the play will help clarify those subtleties of deconstruction.

Although obvious transgression of normative gender characteristics does not occur, there are points in the action which suggest assimilation of gender traits which are commonly associated with the opposite sex. Both Niobe and Procne oppress other women, imitative of patriarchal forms of oppression. Procne does so when she enforces silence on the Female Chorus because she cannot understand their fragmented and oblique language. Niobe simulates the effect of patriarchal oppression on Philomele when she condones her rape and tongue-cutting. Both women are shown to have been conscripted into patriarchal ideology, though for differing reasons. Niobe is embittered and has been broken down to

comply with the ways of her oppressor, probably having no more strength to either believe or act in resistance. Procne has been educated to emulate patriarchal Athenian thought and understand it as the only valid form of meaning and understanding.

Gender deconstruction in the play is also affected through dramatic situations which challenge the male gaze. Wertenbaker sets this challenge by reversing the gaze, by mocking or repelling it, and by literally deconstructing it by foregrounding its inherent implications. The first instance where the gaze is challenged is in scene 2 with Philomele and Procne, when Philomele looks on with passionate desire at soldiers fighting. The intense, sensual passion with which she responds to the image of the soldier reverses the dynamic of desire and thus challenges the male gaze with a female gaze. This may indeed be true at only a superficial level, given the innocence and naivety of Philomele's gaze in comparison to the male gaze which is fraught with rapacious potential. However, the visual signal of women looking at men with obvious sexual desire does connote the possibility of a female gaze and defies the notion of women as strictly the objects of the sexual gaze.

The true nature of the male gaze, as I suggest it above, is alluded to by the Male Chorus in their repeated narration of Tereus watching Philomele (scenes 6 and 8). They emphasize Tereus's act of watching in the context of his increasing desire and the encroaching danger to Philomele. The implication is that there is power in the male gaze; the potential for action exists within the

gaze, dormant and waiting for physical manifestation. This idea of potential within the male gaze in effect deconstructs it, revealing it as being more than harmless looking but a possible step to violation. Challenging the male gaze by refuting it through repelling and mocking it occurs in scene 19 during the Bacchic revels when the two soldiers standing guard outside the revels become curious about what the women do in their festival. Looking through a window onto the revels, the First Soldier is clearly shocked by what he sees:

> FIRST SOLDIER: Oh.
> SECOND SOLDIER: What?
> FIRST SOLDIER: Oh, you gods.
> SECOND SOLDIER: Well? What are they doing? Exactly? What?
> FIRST SOLDIER: (*Jumping down, laughing*) Nothing.
> (*He does a dance with the* SECOND SOLDIER.)
> Dancing. Lots of wine. They've got swords
> and lances. (43)

Wertenbaker suggests the behaviour of the women in the revels as aberrant to the expectation held within the male gaze. Furthermore, the action is another example of gender difference and cultural variation: the Thracian men find the ritual of the Thracian women ridiculous ("It's supposed to be a mystery. A woman's mystery.... Give me a break" [42]). Another key point in the play which defies the male gaze is Philomele's crude re-enactment with the dolls of Tereus raping her and cutting out her tongue. She represents and exposes the ugly and violent extension of the male gaze.

An important aspect of Wertenbaker's deconstructive treatment is her emphasis on the dynamic of silence and absence in some characters. Overt silence in a character draws focus to the that which they withhold. The Female Chorus are the more obvious

example of this; they are forced into silence by Procne using her matriarchal authority over them, and also, in another sense, by their own discourse which, as Procne says, emphasizes the silence between words. Their silence is indicative of a culture of women who live under patriarchal authority, under the power of the master or lord, which they define as danger. As June makes clear, they are aware of the restriction they live under as women and servants: "All service is danger and all marriage too" (20). They suggest through their silence and fragmented discourse that their means of expression must be oblique for self-protection from the power they live under. Such constriction of expression, however, promotes strengthened perception, as a blind person's hearing and touch become heightened. Thus the Female Chorus have "Another way of listening" (21) through their oppressed silence, and this sharpens their intuitive senses. Wertenbaker does not impose qualitative judgment on the silence of the Female Chorus; instead, she points to its cause: namely, patriarchal power, and its effect being the strengths hidden within an oppressed condition. Indeed, any oppressed group or individual must find some ingenious means of exploiting or undermining their oppression in order to transcend that condition; this is precisely what Philomele does in reclaiming her voice with the dolls she has made.

Tereus displays two stages of self-imposed silence which are charged with latent emotion: first, his brooding silence on the voyage and desolate beach before his brutal act; second, during the period five years later when he is withdrawn from Procne. Integral

with the implications of his gaze at Philomele, Tereus's silence suggests his internal struggle with his lustful desire. His attempts at speaking with Philomele are constantly refuted, and so intensified, stressing the power of language which Philomele has over him and his propensity for physical action in place of metaphysical connection and communication. As a leader he occupies a lonely position which, within his economy of ruler and ruled, demands his isolation from others. He prefers sport to theatre: theatre helps Pandion think: sport, it is implied, helps Tereus act. Thinking and speaking are not Tereus's means of interaction with people; in fact, he does not interact, he acts upon. Thus, within his gaze and his silence is the promise of action. The Male Chorus certainly know this by witnessing it, though they try to ignore it. The Female Chorus know it by understanding who and what Tereus is in the context of his cultural and gender constituency (HERO: "And Tereus is a young man" [21]). But through the prolonged month of silence and waiting before his action on the beach, Tereus signals an internal struggle. He clearly attempts to make Philomele see and reciprocate his desire before acting. Wertenbaker does not present him as a one-dimensional character; he struggles with himself before he is finally overcome by himself. Only when he is struck by the act of revenge by Procne and Philomele is he able to briefly express himself; his desire, his pain and his belief:

> I loved her. When I silenced her, it was from love. She didn't want my love. She could only mock, and soon rebel, she was dangerous. (47)

Five years after the rape, while Procne has warmed to Tereus

("I can take pleasure in my husband" [39]), Tereus is clearly withdrawn, concealing himself from her. She refers to his frequent absences, unknowingly pointing to his visits to Philomele, whom he keeps imprisoned. His silence here suggests remorse, or at least guilt from his betrayal of both the sisters. But, again, Tereus is bound by his own character; he is unable to reverse the damage he has instigated, and thus entraps himself in perpetuating it. In scene 20 he shows his hopelessness, his incomprehension of himself and of the world beyond his patriarchal-military model, when he is challenged by the reunited sisters:

> (PHILOMELE *is revealed. Hands bloodied. There is a silence.*)
> TEREUS: I had wanted to say.
> PROCNE: Say what, Tereus.
> TEREUS: If I could explain.
> PROCNE: You have a tongue.
> TEREUS: Beyond words.
> PROCNE: What?
> TEREUS: When I ride my horse into battle, I see where I am going. But close your eyes for an instant and the world whirls around. That is what happened. The world whirled round.
> (*Pause.*)
> PROCNE: What kept you silent? Shame?
> TEREUS: No.
> PROCNE: What?
> TEREUS: I can't say. There are no rules.
> PROCNE: I obeyed rules: the rules of parents, the rule of marriage, the rules of my loneliness, you. And now you say. This.
> TEREUS: I have no other words. (46-47)

By making his silence and remorse evident, Wertenbaker fully develops Tereus's character, revealing some true-human dimensions and their cultural construction.

By their own actions, the Male Chorus suggest the covert ideological function behind Tereus's silence. They choose inverted

silence by not hearing or seeing the danger in their narrative, which in fact means they disclaim the narrative as theirs -- a point I shall come back to. The Male Chorus is silenced by their will to maintain patriarchal order, to conceal disorder and inexplicability. They show how the patriarchal economy of power intersects and interferes with signals of danger or corruption, causing a form of selective hearing and seeing; they choose to overlook things which are disruptive to their sense of order and understanding. The two soldiers who look into the Bacchic revels also exemplify this blind-eye mentality. When the Second Soldier sees Itys killed by the sisters, his response is complete denial of the sight:

> I'm drunk. I didn't see anything. It didn't happen. The god has touched me with madness. For looking. I'm seeing things. I didn't see anything. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing....I don't know anything. I wasn't here. (45)

The soldiers cannot fathom the act of the women and therefore try to erase it; they show a coping mechanism which Wertenbaker proposes as being characteristic of masculine (if not patriarchal) gender constitution in this play. Contrasting with this paradigm, the women of the play, out of necessity, confront incomprehensible aspects of their world.

Philomele's most poignant moment of confrontation occurs after she is raped by Tereus. Finding the violation indeed incomprehensible, she nevertheless struggles with trying to find the reason, contesting Niobe's cynical and defeatist advice that she is "nothing" and should "grovel". She uses her own source of strength when she undermines his physical power by defining it as

an act of weakness; she asserts her power of language over his violence:

> ...It was your act. It was you. I caused nothing. And Procne is not dead. I can smell her on you. You. You lied. And you. What did you tell your wife, my sister, Procne, what did you tell her? Did you tell her you violated her sister, the sister she gave into your trust? Did you tell her what a coward you are and that you could not, cannot bear to look at me? Did you tell her that despite my fear, your violence, when I saw you in your nakedness I couldn't help laughing because you were so shrivelled, so ridiculous and it is not the way it is in statues? Did you tell her that you cut me because you yourself had no strength?...There's nothing inside you. You're only full when you're filled with violence. And they obey you? Look up to you? Have the men and women of Thrace seen you naked? Shall I tell them? Yes, I will talk....You call this man your king, men and women of Thrace, this scarecrow dribbling embarrassed lust, that is what I will say to them, you revere him, but have you looked at him? No? Your're too awed, he wears his cloak of might and virility with such ease you won't look beneath....And if, women of Thrace, he wants to force himself on you, trying to stretch his puny manhood to your intimacies, you call that high spirits? And you soldiers, you'll follow into battle a man who lies, a man of tiny spirit and shrivelled courage? Wouldn't you prefer someone with truth and goodness, self-control and reason? Let my sister rule in his place...as long as I have the words to expose you....(34-36)

Although Philomele has her tongue cut out as a result of her emasculating tirade, she recognizes and names the crime of Tereus, giving her the purpose and strength to follow through with her threats of exposure five years later. Philomele manages to transcend her victimization by combining her anger with imagination and ingenuity in making the dolls. She recreates and reasserts her strength in language by finding another way of expressing it. In so doing, she deconstructs Tereus by showing his weak and vulnerable side, and by revealing her victimization as the antithesis of his power, the binary opposite by which power exists.

For Wertenbaker, language is integral for drawing character delineations. More specifically, she uses language in Nightingale to illustrate distinctions between and among men and women within various cultural contexts, including their roles within the structures of power. I have attempted to show the fundamental problems of language and self-expression between the main characters, and also to point out the Male and Female Choruses' function in embellishing the juxtaposing of gendered discourses. For a final assessment of language difference, the Choruses provide some pertinent distinctions which inform understanding of Wertenbaker's idea of gendered discourses.

Neither the Male nor the Female Chorus deviate in any radical way from the functions of the classical Greek chorus.[43] In fact, Wertenbaker follows a similar choral formula as Aristophanes in his comedy Lysistrata, where there are two choruses representing opposite sexes. It is not my intention here, however, to compare Wertenbaker's play to the forms on which it is roughly modeled.

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[43] Oscar Brockett sums up the supposed uses of the Greek chorus: "The chorus serves several functions in Greek drama. First, it is a character in the play; it gives advice, expresses opinions, asks questions and sometimes takes an active part in the action. Second, it often establishes the ethical or social framework of the events and sets up a standard against which the action may be judged. Third, it frequently serves as an ideal spectator, reacting to the events and characters as the dramatist might hope the audience would. Fourth, the chorus helps to set the overall mood of the play and of the individual scenes and to heighten the dramatic effects. Fifth, it adds movement, spectacle, song and dance, and thus contributes much to theatrical effectiveness. Sixth, it serves an important rhythmical function, creating pauses or retardations during which the audience may reflect upon what has happened and what is to come." From, Oscar G. Brockett, History of the Theatre, 5th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1987) 30.

Rather, I want to examine how she uses the respective choral discourses to point out gender difference and reinforce the deconstruction of gender.

The Male Chorus are predominantly pragmatic conveyors of information, such as their descriptions of dramatic and physical settings. They reveal paradox and contradiction, partly through their reportage and largely through their inaction. They briefly create a dialectical discourse amongst themselves (scene 8), but essentially speak with collective intent. Moreover, they always refer to themselves as the collective "we", even though they speak as individual members. They briefly use lyrical and metaphoric language for description, such as that which describes the encroaching danger in scene 6. Their development as characters is internal and circular. In scene 6 they vacillate about acting to help prevent the danger they see coming, but they revert to inaction and seem to concentrate on justifying that inaction for the remainder of their part in the play. Their development, then, is limited to their resistance to actual interaction; they seek to remain in their self-defined role. When the action becomes too complex after scene 14 they completely withdraw.

The Female Chorus also speak individually and with essentially collective intent; but they use first-person self-reference. When they speak among themselves, their language is lyrical, imagistic and based on intuition rather than empiricism and logic. When speaking with Procne, their speech becomes more brief and fragmented. In moments of fear or repression, they repeat

single words, echoing each other. By the end of the play, their discourse has become more direct, with rhetorical questions and modern references; they have become authoritative guides in the myth ("we show you a myth"). Although their development is constrained by the cultural barrier between them and Procne, they try to respond to the danger they sense. They are limited not so much by themselves as by their social role as servants and by the cultural prejudice Procne holds against them. Their total development clearly moves forward; they grow as characters and learn to assert their disturbing questions.

Wertenbaker does not hide her bias by presenting the Male Chorus as static and condoning of the problems in the story and the Female Chorus as actively struggling with those problems. In the social context of this play, the women must confront and struggle because they are on the recipient side of oppression; whereas the men can afford to ignore it because they inscribe themselves with the oppressor. Yet, through Wertenbaker's deconstructive representation of characters and events, the dynamics of oppression are suggested to be far more complex and often result in an inversion of what they first appear to be. For example, Tereus suffers perhaps equally as much as the sisters because of himself, his cultural construction as a coercive leader. Indeed we get a glimpse of what his training in masculine aggression was like when we see the moulding process of his son Itys. Wertenbaker highlights these kinds of causal links between the various actions of the characters, suggesting that part of her endeavour is to come to

terms with the different ways of responding to difficult issues. She shows a problem from a number of perspectives, and in so doing deconstructs the problem and its key constituent factors of gender and cultural variations.

In the overall dramaturgy of the play, the choruses are pivotal because they stand on both sides of the story, so to speak. They are inside the story as characters and outside the story as narrators. On the outside of the story they create a framework which constitutes a meta-narration of its own. But even the meta-narration has multiple strands because of the two distinct choruses and their multiple functions. Wertenbaker presents the play in a series of shifting perspectives largely through the employment of the Female and Male Chorus. These perspective shifts embellish the play's deconstruction of both gender and myth as they effect constant change or disruption of the way the audience may receive the narrative.

Essentially, the Male Chorus spend the first six scenes of the play in the apparently authoritative role as guide to the action, telling in "objective" third-person narration of the events. During those first six scenes, their narration is intercut with the enacted "subjective" story, which means the perspective moves back and forth between subjective and objective. Then, between scenes 6 and 14, the Male Chorus shift into first-person narration, implying that they are in fact not the all-knowing guides of the myth but that they play a role in driving the myth. As I have mentioned, they undercut their credibility by showing

their subjective-human qualities. Finally, after scene 14, they become obsolete as both narrators and characters. The Female Chorus spend the majority of the play, up to scene 20, as characters in the action. However, within their role in the action they still reflect another perspective by their specifically feminine-Thracian constitution and their ability to see oblique images of the future. At scene 20 the Female Chorus make a significant shift into third-person narration and direct address to the audience ("JUNE: We show you a myth" [46]); suddenly they inhabit an authoritative role requiring the audience to view them differently.

The main characters' action which intersperses the various choral roles also shifts back and forth between two perspectives: they enact the story representationally and presentationally. By representational I mean the realistic scenes which encourage the audience to become emotionally enwrapped in the dramatic moment; for example, when Philomele and Tereus reach their climactic conflict. By presentational I mean the points at which the action becomes non-realistic and provokes the audience to reflect critically on the action; for example, when Niobe speaks in monologue about the rape of her country while Philomele is raped by Tereus in the background.

The audience, then, must contend with frequent changes in the perspective from which the story is told, including moments when the story is interrupted for reflective commentary. This condition of the play effects the deconstruction project because it emphatically shows both multiple (including gendered) sides of the

story itself and it reveals and problematizes the mythical framework and construction of the story. These points may also be described as functions of the alienation effect: the audience is discouraged from the habit of unquestioningly identifying with aspects of the narrative and are instead challenged to assess it critically.

There are three significant moments which create an alienating effect: scene 8, when the Male Chorus reflect on "What is a myth?"; scene 20, when the Female Chorus name and question similar atrocities; and the final scene 21, when the main characters are transformed into birds. This last scene is particularly strange in the context of the whole play because it engages a whole new dimension; it is indeed mythical because the human forces which clearly drive the preceding scenes are no longer evident. Wertenbaker makes a radical style change here to suggest the need for a very different perspective from which the events of the story can be reconsidered. Philomele, as the nightingale, points to this when she talks with Itys:

> ...we were all so angry the bloodshed would have gone on forever. So it was better to become a nightingale. You see the world differently. (48)

Wertenbaker writes tremendous theatrical potential into the dramatic text, and this should be exploited in its staging and performance. The implications made by the dramatic text for the performance text are perhaps evident, given the dramaturgical and thematic elements I have discussed. In effectively bringing out the central idea of revealing gender and culture difference as the

dynamic force in the play, the staging and performance need to clearly reflect those points of difference as well as enhance the perspective shifts. Hence, the fundamental resources of staged theatre such as costumes, setting, lighting, sound, movement and spacial relationships should be well considered for plastically creating the world and ideas I have discussed.

In addition to the obvious necessity of distinguishing men from women and Thracians from Athenians, an important differentiation among characters also exists between the two chorus groups and the other characters, for the Male and Female Choruses hold a distinct dramaturgical position from the other characters. It is also important to take into account the cultural difference between the choruses. While it is quite clear that the Female Chorus is a Thracian group, it is ambiguous as to which culture the Male Chorus is actually a part of because at first they seem to be Athenian and later they seem Thracian. This point could be stressed, for it implies the transitory potential of the men in the play contrasted by the women who remain confined to one setting, excepting those who are displaced by the authority of men (such as Procne, Philomele and Niobe). In addition to the material resources of theatre I mention above, the style of character enactment may also effect the various distinctions in the play. For example, the main characters who are quite fully developed should reflect such delineation in contrast with the less developed characters (such as the Soldiers who are essentially parodied characters). Furthermore, the variety of enactment may also emphasize the perspective shifts,

particularly those key points of alienation-effect during scenes 8, 20 and 21.

In Nightingale, Wertenbaker has a similar approach as with New Anatomies: she illuminates the perspective from which the story is presented, but in Nightingale she shows multiple perspectives. Where the "biased" perspective of Isabelle's story suggests a sympathetic portrayal, so do the multiple perspectives of the various character constellations suggest a certain sympathy towards their struggles -- as I have said, Wertenbaker does not make Tereus a simplified "bad" character. It is largely through the perspective shifts throughout the play that Wertenbaker deconstructs ideas of gender and culture, while also deconstructing the mythic framework. Neither of these parallel projects is a radical or necessarily subversive form of deconstruction because the means for exposure of something such as gender is based more on the premise of "being in his/her shoes" rather than having he/she make an extreme transgression from a normative role. In this regard, the suggested remedy for the problems shown in the play is similar to Mary Traverse where the need for recognition and understanding of differences is essential. Although this theme may seem simplistic, if not idealistic, it is mainly the means by which it is conveyed which gives it a more critical exposition. That is, the retelling of a myth which is at once modern and antiquated makes the theme defamiliarized and therefore more effective.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS: DEVELOPING FEMINISM IN THE THEATRE OF TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER

I suggest in Chapter One that Wertenbaker uses deconstruction as an approach to fulfilling an essentially feminist agenda and that her plays put into practice the theories of deconstruction and feminism. It is relevant to conclude this study by specifically identifying and locating the feminism in the three plays, particularly as it develops and matures over the seven-year period in which the plays where written.

Characteristic of all three plays examined in this thesis, Wertenbaker creates protagonists who begin their respective journeys with naive and passionate imaginations. Isabelle, Mary and Philomele desire experience, and the opening of each play emphasizes the manifestation of such desire in the character's imagination and wonderment of the world "outside" their domestic, paternalistic settings. Each gains experience and knowledge of the world, yet they do not come to any conclusive understanding of it. Nevertheless, Wertenbaker commends the fact that the women struggle

with and confront the problematic constructions of the social world, as Mary Traverse says, "[with] no illusions". This struggle-confrontation constitutes the broad thematic link between New Anatomies, Mary Traverse and Nightingale.

The most significant characteristic shared by Isabelle, Mary and Philomele is their strong urge to speak out or against oppressive circumstances; Wertenbaker puts considerable emphasis on her characters' faith in language and desire for its expression. There are even similarities of speech to the extent that Isabelle and Philomele make the same self-reflexive comment about their urge to speak. At the salon, when Isabelle disgusts the women with her revelation about her sexual practice, she comments: "too free with my tongue. Too free" (328). Philomele comments when Tereus misconstrues her passionate expressions, "Oh, my careless tongue. Procne always said - my wandering tongue" (29). Meanwhile, Mary comments repeatedly that she speaks well, such as when she seduces Giles: "But my conversation, Sir, is my greatest charm" (96). All three women are persecuted for speaking, yet they all persist in spite of the pain, banishment and manipulation which are imposed as means for silencing them. This common point in the three plays articulates a fundamental feminist tenet: that women must find a voice and langauge in order to combat oppression and to express self-chosen identity. Through their respective use of language, Isabelle, Mary and Philomele make significant steps in breaking away from conventional feminine passivity.

In addition to her recurrent stress on the power of

language, Wertenbaker creates some very similar key character dynamics; most notably, the relationships among women characters. Isabelle and Philomele both have older, conservative sisters who attempt to subdue their respective younger sister's passions. Mary and Philomele have critical and dangerous relationships with older, embittered women, Mrs. Temptwell and Niobe respectively, who seek some form of vengeance on the younger women. All three protagonists have, or had, mothers who represent sketches of women who have been repressed or defeated by patriarchy. Wertenbaker clearly accentuates the variety and impact of the relationships her women protagonists have with other women, with a principle objective of showing how the women differ from each other, as a heterogeneous group, and the consequential effects they may have on each other. Here Wertenbaker exemplifies an important premise of recent feminist thinking: that women do not form a homogeneous group and that they may not necessarily have a basis for solidarity in their femaleness, but that differences of age, culture (race), and class may far override female anatomy. At the same time, nonetheless, Wertenbaker does suggest the crucial and influential impact of the women's relationships. Thus, by refusing a simple charting of the female relationship dynamics, Wertenbaker challenges and problematizes conventional thinking about women as a group.

While there are other similarities among the three plays, it is particularly enlightening to review their distinctions of dramaturgical approach, for these indicate the development of Wertenbaker's treatment of gender issues. Moreover, in both

dramatic and performance text, each of the plays closely represent certain stages or perspectives of feminist thought. In order to lay emphasis on this development, a brief overview of the textual approaches in each play is needed.

The dramatic text of New Anatomies is relatively simple: the plot deals with an extreme case of gender transgression, showing outright renunciation of womanhood. The dramatic dynamic in the play is straightforward: Isabelle does not want to be a "European woman", but instead she wants to be an "Arab man". Though her endeavour is indeed complicated by other characters, the through-line of dramatic action is clearly evident. Furthermore, gender and culture are treated as one and the same concept and are thereby simplified. Although the performance text of New Anatomies is indeed radical and complex in its theatrical conventions, it essentially enacts and exaggerates the dramatic text without actually transforming the concepts of gender deconstruction therein. If the performance text does alter anything about the dramatic text it is that it obscures aspects such as character delineation. Nevertheless, in the final analysis, as I conclude in Chapter Two, this obscuring does not truly change anything; rather, it only makes gender identification and definition of the characters more challenging and thus enhances its deconstruction.

In Mary Traverse, Wertenbaker complicates the problems of gender by compounding and drawing links between problems of class-oppression and political corruption. She also introduces a variety of characters who variously embody those problems. Thus, the story

is not only about gender, though gender certainly is central, but attempts a complex deconstructive project in exposing the problematic social matrix of gender, class and politics. The performance text of Mary Traverse is relatively straightforward, especially compared to that of New Anatomies, because it does not appear to deviate from the literal images suggested in the dramatic text. The performance text does, nevertheless, enhance the contradictions of character and setting which I have discussed. Furthermore, the performance text features some significant breaks with traditional staging by the potential depiction of graphic sexuality. Despite these embellishments, there is still no aspect of the performance which undercuts the dramatic text.

In Nightingale, Wertenbaker draws back from the convoluted socio-political issues of Mary Traverse and instead she focuses the dramatic text on the dynamics among women and men and cultures. Though politics and class play a part, the deconstruction works primarily to illuminate gender problems by emphasizing differences of discourse between and within the sexes and cultures. In contrast to the other two works, the dramatic and performance texts work in a kind of dramaturgical harmony: the scheme of juxtaposing gender and cultural discourses is equally enhanced by both textual approaches. That is, the settings and situations of the performance text do not contradict or disrupt the dramatic text in the manner of New Anatomies or in the way the events of Mary Traverse are often incongruous within the settings.

These observations of the three plays suggest a number of

things about the way Wertenbaker has developed her feminist thinking and deconstructive approach to gender. When New Anatomies was written in 1981, Wertenbaker radically exploded normative notions of gender roles and identities; thus, her depiction of the extreme case of Isabelle Eberhardt. When Mary Traverse was written in 1985, she illustrated the complex dynamic of class and politics with which issues of gender are inextricably entwined; thus, the multiple and convoluted problems experienced by Mary when she encounters "the world outside". When Nightingale was written in 1988, Wertenbaker pointed out how fundamental differences of discourse among genders and cultures are at the root of discord between the various groups. Hence, to generally chart her feminist development from 1981 to 1988, Wertenbaker starts by taking an extremist approach in deconstructing traditional notions of gender, she then takes account of the broader political facets of women's gender struggles, and finally, she focuses on differences of discourse as a fundamental cause of gender conflict. Viewed in this linear way, Wertenbaker develops from a predominantly reactionary perspective to a more analytic perspective in presenting her issues of gender.

As I briefly outlined in the first chapter of this thesis, feminist theory generally forms three streams which are not necessarily mutually exclusive: equality between women and men; distinction of the differences between women and men; and exposition of the social construction and binary opposition of "woman" and "man". I also suggested that Wertenbaker falls

primarily into the third stream of feminism, which is manifested in her deconstructive treatment of gender. While this third stream does predominate, the three plays also represent all three streams. For example: the demand for equality between the sexes is often criticized for resulting in a situation where women essentially imitate men, or where women invert the problems of oppression; both Isabelle and Mary show these symptoms in their attempts to break away from traditional gender constrictions. In her plays, it is evident that Wertenbaker illustrates, criticizes and eventually analyzes feminist approaches to overcoming oppression; amongst other critical points, she shows the mistakes which can be made in the feminist struggle. In this regard, I would suggest that she shows a critical sympathy, for she takes pains to explicate the process and inevitability of such mistakes.

As I say, when Wertenbaker wrote Nightingale she moved into a more subtle deconstruction of gender which entailed a more analytical approach to the struggle. By emphasizing gender/culture difference, the play shows how women can contribute to their own oppression; indeed, the play is about a man's brutal rape of a woman, but Wertenbaker also sheds light on the various circumstances which lead to the rape act. Furthermore, the fact that she reveals some of the internal struggle of Tereus, the male offender, also suggests that she tries to come to terms with the patriarchal perspective rather then simply condemn it. Nightingale does not fit the same pattern of gender deconstruction found in New Anatomies and Mary Traverse, where extreme gender transgression

occurs, instead the play deconstructs more common male-female dynamics and attempts to point out subtleties of experiences. I believe that Nightingale represents a matured feminist perspective; a perspective which necessarily developed by stages, through the extreme reaction of Isabelle and the convoluted revolution of Mary.

Despite her feminist stance, I do not believe that Wertenbaker could be described as political in the sense of espousing a specific ideology. Her protagonists are not ideologues in their various struggles, with the exception of Mary Traverse who enters a political-ideological phase but clearly fails in it. Wertenbaker's politics are more concerned with undermining certain power structures (primarily patriarchal) than with necessarily replacing them. If she comes through as an advocate for a particular social perspective, however, it is that of heterogeneity among sexes and cultures. As I have discussed in the previous chapters, each of her plays stresses open-ended hope at its conclusion. In this respect, she uses the approach of deconstruction and the impulse of feminism to show what she presumably perceives as social reality; and this necessitates the act of problematizing normative culture and society. Moreover, Wertenbaker seems to suggest that once we have deconstructed for the purpose of exposing and recognizing vice, for lack of a better word, we should then be able to *reconstruct*. In fact, her play titles point to this for each hold the possibility of optimism: New Anatomies, The *Grace* of Mary Traverse and The *Love* of the Nightingale.

POSTFACE

When I began this study of Wertenbaker's treatment of gender, I set a question before myself: "what is (are) Wertenbaker's gender paradigm(s)?" But, as I put myself through a premature and unsuccessful struggle over the question, I found myself struggling with the meaning of "paradigm". The dictionary (Oxford) and thesaurus (Roget's) define paradigm as being a pattern, example, model, standard, archetype, etc; another source[44] suggests that paradigm is a set of ideas which come to a certain crystallization through which meaning and understanding are constructed; a sociology textbook defines the term as being "a fundamental model or scheme that organizes our view of something".[45] I could not reconcile my initial perceptions of Wertenbaker's treatment of gender with these definitions of paradigm. I eventually realized that this was because the paradigm of gender constitutes the binary oppositional scheme -- man/woman-masculine/feminine -- and this is precisely what Wertenbaker combats. Moreover, if she were to replace that paradigm of gender she would be merely instituting another paradigm. I have attempted

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[44] Professor Carl Hare, Department of Drama, University of Alberta.

[45] Earl Babbie, The Practice of Social Research, 3rd ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1983) 38.

in this thesis to show that Wertenbaker does not suggest any model, pattern or archetype of gender, but that she tries to move the concept of gender into a free-floating, unprescriptive mode of identity. She leaves gender at that point, from which -- indeed, perhaps inevitably -- new paradigmatic concepts of gender may emerge. My argument is that she does not prescribe where, what or how new paradigms may emerge. Thus, to correct my initial question and to build on my original thesis statement: Timberlake Wertenbaker deconstructs the gender paradigm.

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APPENDIX

PLAYS BY TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER

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